

Mr. COCHRAN. Madam President, I move to reconsider the vote.

Mr. CARDIN. I move to lay that motion upon the table.

The motion to lay upon the table was agreed to.

AGRICULTURAL ACT OF 2014— CONFERENCE REPORT—Continued

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

INCOME INEQUALITY

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, on Tuesday evening, President Obama, in his State of the Union Address, made the point that America must be the land of opportunity for all. He acknowledged, quite frankly, that for many families in this country the American dream is just that, a dream.

Many families have lost hope that their children or grandchildren will be able to achieve the American dream. President Obama made the point that if we all work together, the outlook for this country is strong and that we can make not only the American dream something people can continue to believe but it can become a reality for more and more American families.

But he also expressed the reality of where we are. The facts indicate that intergenerational mobility, that is, for a child born into poverty, their ability to move up the economic ladder has not changed in the last several decades. The American dream has become just that for too many families.

Let me point out some of the income disparity we have seen grow in the United States. Some of this is very understandable. It is understandable that people get paid differently. Some people work a lot harder, some people come up with an incredibly ingenious way of doing something, the American way of developing new technologies, people are willing to take greater risks than others. Yes, the reward will be greater. We do expect and we do appreciate, we do look up to people who can be very successful in our economic system.

But what is not understandable is how we have seen a growth in the income disparity among Americans during good times and bad times. Between 1979 and 2007, the top 1 percent in income in America saw their income go up 275 percent, whereas the three middle quintiles—this is what we usually consider to be the middle class, those from 20 percent to 80 percent—saw their income go up only 40 percent. This is in a period of economic growth in this country from 1979. To see your income go up only 40 percent, whereas the wealthiest are going up close to 300 percent, should be of concern to people of this country.

As we all know, in 2007 we went through a recession. Since that recession, median income in this country has declined. It went down 31 percent during the recession. But for the wealthiest, it actually went up. It went

up 31 percent. The median income went down for most Americans.

We have a problem. During good times, we are seeing the income of the wealthiest get larger, in bad times we see wealthy people protected, whereas middle-income families are doing worse. We even have what is known as the birth lottery. If you are born into poverty, we know you have a hard time getting out of poverty today. If you are in certain communities, it is even much more difficult.

So President Obama was right to concentrate on America as opportunity for all. How can we get a growing middle class in this country? What can we do to help everyone do better in our country? Many countries are doing much better than we are. This disparity strikes at the heart of who we are as a nation. We believe that if you work hard, you play according to the rules, you should be able to succeed in this country. For too many families, that is not the reality.

What can we do to make a difference? I know there has been a lot of talk as to what we can do to help in that regard, what we can do to make it better. It is very important to do that for the values of our country. It is important for the families who are affected. But it is also important for our economy.

So, yes, we need to increase opportunity for middle-income families so more people can live the American dream. We need to do that because that is what we stand for as a country. Those are our values. But we also need to do this for our economy. It is very interesting that the companies that are making money today are ready to invest in the growth of our economy. They need consumers. They need people who will buy the automobiles. They need people who will eat in the restaurants. They need people who will go on vacations. They need people who will buy the clothing in the stores. If they do not have the income to do it, they do not buy the products, our economy does not grow. So a growing middle class is critically important to our economy.

What steps can we take? First, we have already taken one very important step with the passage of the Affordable Care Act. The Affordable Care Act dealt with health care costs. We have seen a reduction in the rate of health care costs over the past couple of years. It is a major cost among American families. It has been growing and growing every year. We are now starting to see a slowdown in that. Why? Because we are dealing with health delivery. We are trying to make the health care system more efficient by looking at the total care of an individual rather than just looking at a specific episode.

We are trying to reduce readmissions. We are dealing with healthy lifestyles. The Affordable Care Act rewards all of those issues. We make quality affordable insurance available to all Americans.

Last year, nearly 2 million families had to go through bankruptcy in Amer-

ica because of health care costs. Last year it was estimated that 56 million American families struggled to pay their medical bills. So this is an issue we need to look at from the point of view of helping middle-income families.

Alan Krueger, the economist, observed:

We helped the middle class and those struggling to get into the middle class by lowering the growth of health care costs, by preventing those with pre-existing conditions from being denied health insurance coverage, by creating exchanges for small businesses and lower income families to obtain health insurance at competitive rates, and by providing tax subsidies to small businesses and lower income workers to purchase insurance.

The point Mr. Krueger was making is when we eliminate preexisting conditions, when we have health exchanges that allow individuals and small businesses to be able to get competitive rates, we are helping with middle-income growth in America.

There is a lot more we need to do in addition to the health care problems we have in this country. The President mentioned during his State of the Union Address that Americans need a pay raise. I could not agree with him more. In 1968—that was 46 years ago—the minimum wage in this country was set at \$1.60 per hour. If you adjust that for inflation, the minimum wage would be \$10.77. The minimum wage in America is not \$10.77, it is \$7.25 per hour. The tipped employee minimum wage is \$2.13. For a full-time worker at the minimum wage, \$7.25 per hour wage, they would be making a little over \$15,000 a year. You cannot support your family on \$15,000 a year.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition has done a study. There is not a single State in the Union where you can afford affordable housing. They defined that as a two-bedroom housing unit on the rental market. There is not a single State in the Nation where the \$15,000-a-year income allows you to be able to afford that housing for your family.

The American dream is on life support. We need to do more about that. One thing we can easily do in this Congress this year is raise the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour.

We also need to adjust it for inflation. What does that mean? We have only adjusted minimum wages maybe three times in the last 30-some years. We need to have the minimum wage keep up with inflation. That way we do not have to deal with abrupt increases. We will have gentle increases, which I think is better for our economy to start off with, but it also keeps the minimum wage at where we want to set it. It does not erode the year after we pass it.

I think that makes sense. Let me dispel some of the myths about the minimum wage.

I hear frequently: Well, we are only taking about teenagers or those in their early twenties, it is their first job, and it is not so serious.

Let's look at the facts. The average age of a person earning minimum wage is 35. The median age is 31; 36 percent are over 40 years of age, 40 years of age or older; 56 percent are women—now only 56 percent of our workforce is women, but at minimum wage it is much more likely to be a woman than a man earning minimum wage; 28 percent of people who are earning the minimum wage have children. These are families trying to live on minimum wage.

Increasing the minimum wage will help to grow the middle class. It will help our economy. A \$10.10 per hour minimum wage will generate about \$34 billion in wages into our economy, \$34 billion. Do you know what that means for the local businesses that are there? Do you know what that means for our economy? I know our economy is on the right path, but we have to help it along. We don't have enough jobs in America, and \$35 billion will allow that local supermarket or that restaurant or that business owner to hire some more people, creating more jobs, helping our economy continue to grow.

People who work full time shouldn't live in poverty. Today, with the current minimum wage, and even with the tax credits we have available, most individuals will live in poverty. That is unacceptable. At \$10.10 per hour, we will be above the poverty line with the tax credits.

That is what we should do. If we play according to the rules, we should be able to succeed; work 40 hours a week, we shouldn't have to live in poverty, not in the United States of America.

Americans understand this. Polls have shown over and over that the overwhelming majority of Americans support a reasonable adjustment in the minimum wage. The Gallup poll found that 76 percent of Americans believe Congress should pass an increase in the minimum wage. President Obama has already taken action, and I applaud him for that. He is going to be signing an executive order. So those people who are Federal workers, from a contractor, Federal contract worker, someone who is getting money from the Federal Government and hires people, they are going to have to pay the minimum of a \$10.10 minimum wage. We should do the same for all workers in this country, and we have it in our power to do it.

There are a lot of other things the President mentioned. There are many other issues that I think we need to deal with for our agenda for a growing middle class. We clearly need to do a much better job in education. Education is the key to opportunity in America. It truly does open doors. We want to open up jobs, but we need people who are trained to be competitive for these jobs, particularly in a global economy. We need people trained.

The President is right to say it starts at a very early age, pre-K. In the pre-K through 12, we have to insist on quality education. We have some great

schools in America, but not all children have access to those good schools. We need to do a better job at educating our children in all fields—all fields. STEM is very important, but so are the humanities, so are the arts. We have to do a better job in our pre-K through 12. In higher education, we have to make it much more affordable.

How do we expect to get a growing middle class when so many families are looking at tens of thousands of dollars of educational bills but they don't have any idea of how they are going to be able to pay for it—or our young workers saddled with these large debts affecting what career they are going to go into.

We have to invest in quality education but also affordable higher education. That is why it is important for us to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, to demand that there be value given for the money that we invest in higher education but that we also make it affordable for American families.

We need a modern infrastructure, and the President talked about that. Good jobs go to where there are good roads, good bridges, and good transit systems. Any morning today, try to get around this region; we know how important the transit system is in the Washington area.

In my own State I know we have three major transit projects that we need to get funded so people don't spend hours in gridlock every morning.

We need modern infrastructure in Maryland. In my own State of Maryland we have had tremendous problems with our water infrastructure. We have had roads flooded and homes damaged. We need to rebuild our water infrastructure and assure that people get clean, safe drinking water and that we take care of our water infrastructure in America.

We need a modern energy grid in this country, which is critically important for economic growth. As President Obama said, good jobs go to where there is good infrastructure, and we need to do a better job with the infrastructure in America.

We will have a chance again in this Congress. We haven't reauthorized the Surface Transportation Act. I hope a WRDA bill will get done with some of our WRDA projects. It is in conference today. Those are things we can do to help grow a middle class.

We have to invest in research. I think one of the lines that received the biggest applause in the President's State of the Union Address when he said: We have to restore the cuts we made that we should never have made to the basic research, the National Institutes of Health—headquartered in my State. They are located in every State, but they are headquartered in Maryland. The work they do is critically important to economic growth in our country. We have to invest in research.

We need a progressive tax structure. More and more economists are telling

us that to have a growing middle class, we need the revenue. We are going to pay our bills—we don't want the debt—but we have to do it in a way that is fair and rewards the middle class.

Middle-class families don't take advantage of these tax breaks, these tax loopholes. At a minimum, we have to close those tax loopholes. I agree with the President in that regard.

The President also mentioned in the State of the Union Address that for growing a middle class we want to make sure they have a job, we want to make sure they are trained for that job, we want to make sure they are rewarded for that job with fair wages, and we also want to make sure they have a secure retirement. We are not doing enough to make sure Americans have a secure retirement.

We have to save more as a nation. The best way to save is through retirement savings. We can all come together to do more. This is not a partisan issue. We should be able to do this together.

Let me end on a quote from a former President, Theodore Roosevelt.

He said: "This country will not be a permanently good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a reasonably good place for all of us to live in."

I think that was what President Obama was talking about when he said "opportunity for all."

That is what this Nation stands for. We have all the reason to believe we can accomplish this for the people of America, but we need to work together with the President to work to implement commonsense changes so we can have a growing middle class in America.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, earlier this month the Quinnipiac poll asked voters what the top priority they had for President Obama and Members of Congress in 2014: 18 percent said health care; 16 percent said jobs and unemployment; 15 percent said the economy in general. By comparison, only 1 percent of the voters said income inequality.

In other words, 99 percent of the voters in this Quinnipiac poll felt that income inequality should not be our top priority and that, rather, they would like for us to focus on not only the symptoms of the problems but the root causes: how do we get people back to work; how do we increase upward income mobility, letting people climb that ladder of success so they can pursue their own American dream.

Yet the most significant economic proposal President Obama mentioned in his State of the Union was aimed not at fixing our health care system, creating jobs or boosting growth but, rather, at this idea of reducing income inequality. The American people are pretty darn smart, and they understand that we need to grow the size of the pie, not only cut up the pie into different pieces.

The best way to do that is by guaranteeing that people have the opportunity to pursue their dreams, not some socialistic notion of let's slice up the pie in Washington, DC. No one does better under that kind of system.

But I also mentioned the President's—apparently—signature proposal for addressing income inequality; that is, by raising the minimum wage. I heard my friend from Maryland talking about the minimum wage as if Washington can wave a magic wand and say: You, Mr. Employer, you, Madam Employer, are now going to start paying your employees 40 percent more than you did yesterday because the big bad Federal Government orders you to do so.

They act as if that would have no other consequences or costs.

As I mentioned yesterday, there are studies that have been done that indicate that if we raise the minimum wage to \$10.10, for which the President has argued, it could well dislocate as many as several hundred thousand people from their existing jobs.

Let's think about this for a minute. A small employer has a business—let's say they have a fast food restaurant; I have hundreds of them, maybe thousands of them in my State—and the employer is worried about bringing money in the front door from selling their product, selling the food at their fast food restaurant, they know they are going to have certain expenses. Some of that is the materials or food they put together. Some of it is their overhead such as electricity and energy, but a significant part of that is going to be the cost of labor, paying people to work there.

If we automatically tell that small employer, that fast food restaurant, instead of \$7 an hour, they now have to pay 40 percent more, what is that going to do to their ability to not only hire and grow their business but to maintain their current level of employment?

Perhaps there is a reason the President has counterintuitively decided to come up with some sort of feel good quick patch such as the minimum wage, which would actually make things worse. Perhaps he has decided to focus on this because maybe he is feeling a little bit guilty about his record over the past 4 to 5 years.

According to the New York Times—hardly a bastion of conservative propaganda—the trend of rising inequality “appears to have accelerated during the Obama administration.”

The President—and I will get to this in a moment—appeared to concede that much in his State of the Union speech. In fact, one measure of the income gap suggests the inequality of wages has increased four times faster under President Obama than it did under the 43rd President of the United States, George W. Bush. The best thing we could do to support upward mobility is not to address the symptom of lower wages but to address the root cause, expand the

economy, jobs, and to give people the tools they need to qualify for good, high-paying jobs for which they don't have the job skills currently.

We know a lot of our community colleges, such as the one I visited last week in Houston, San Jacinto College, does a very good job of training people for the skills they need in order to qualify for good, high-paying jobs. That is where we ought to focus our government, not by the Federal Government trying to fix prices when it comes to wages and actually end up making things worse.

Unfortunately, the President seems incapable of embracing an economic strategy that doesn't involve more government, particularly more government spending and more government control over the private sector. My constituents in Texas tell me one reason they are feeling uncertain about the future and the economy, particularly if they are a business owner, is they don't know what kind of new taxes, they don't know what kind of new regulation, and they don't know what financial burden, such as ObamaCare, will be thrust down on them that will totally change their business model and cause them to go bankrupt—perhaps because they hadn't counted on what the Federal Government might do to them, as opposed to the market.

But we have tried the President's approach: big government, spending, stimulus spending, and the like. That is a big reason why we are suffering through the slowest economic recovery since the Great Depression and the highest and longest period of high unemployment since that same time.

Even when the President seems to be supporting a fresh approach, he is actually selling old ideas in a new package. I remember the President talking, for example, about tax reform. He called for abolishing loopholes in the Tax Code and simultaneously lowering the marginal rates. That sounds pretty good. I would support that, and I believe we could get strong bipartisan support for that kind of tax reform—lower the rates, cut out a lot of the underbrush, the tax expenditures.

They are much like the President's own bipartisan fiscal and debt commission, the Simpson-Bowles commission, recommended in December of 2010. But what did the President do when his own bipartisan fiscal commission reported to him a bipartisan plan to deal with the debt and to get the economy moving again? He ignored it. He walked away from it.

Unfortunately, the President, when he talks about tax reform, is actually talking about a way to raise taxes, to raise revenue. This is what I mean by that. He talks about tax reform as a vehicle for a tax increase, even though he has already raised the taxes of hard-working American families by \$1.7 trillion while he has been President. But the American people are plenty smart and they can figure out if the President

is going to eliminate their deductions and tax credits and the like that he is going to have to bring down their rate or else it will actually be a tax increase.

There is another good reason why we need to do the kind of tax reform I am talking about, and that occasionally the President talks about when he is talking about pro-growth tax reform, and that is to make it revenue neutral, to bring down the rates, which will encourage people to invest and create jobs because they know the incentives will be there for them. They will be able to reap the fruits of their labor and of their risk. That is the kind of tax reform both political parties supported back in 1986 and the kind of tax reform we need to do again.

Sadly, the President and the majority leader have chosen to hijack this wonderful idea of tax reform while demanding another \$1 trillion tax increase. Meanwhile, the President wants to use the Tax Code to pick winners and losers by discriminating against certain industries and increasing government subsidies to others.

I heard him talk about the oil and gas industry again. This is actually one of the brightest sectors of the economy. But the President wants to take the goose that laid the golden egg and burden it with additional regulations and taxes.

Truth be known, 80 percent of the tax benefits that flow to the energy sector flow to the so-called green energy sector—many of which I think are important—but we have to be realistic. We are actually writing them a check as opposed to the millions and millions—and literally hundreds of millions of dollars—of tax revenue generated from the oil and gas industry.

If there is one sector of the energy economy that is creating more jobs and opportunity and provides more chance for us to reduce our imports from dangerous parts of the world, it is our domestic energy sector. But the President wants to raise their taxes.

The President acknowledged on Tuesday night that what has happened during the 5-year term of his Presidency is that average wages have barely budged, inequality has deepened, and upward mobility has stalled. In other words, he agrees with the assessment of The New York Times. The problem is the solution to that condition would actually make things worse and not better.

So I actually agree with the President's assessment: During his 5 years as President, average wages have barely budged, inequality has deepened, and upward mobility has stalled. So why in the world would we want to add another \$1 trillion tax burden on our economy and on the productive sector of our economy at a time when average wages have barely budged, inequality has deepened and upward mobility has stalled? Why in the world would we jeopardize the renaissance in American oil and gas production, which represents one of our few economic bright

spots? Why in the world would the President continue to reject the Keystone XL Pipeline from Canada, which would create thousands of well-paying jobs?

You will notice, by the way, Madam President, that President Obama said nothing—zero, zip, nada—about the Keystone XL Pipeline in his State of the Union. It really is just mind-boggling.

I would like to close by noting something the President said about health care, and this is another interesting aspect of his State of the Union speech. It was about 40 minutes into his speech before he even mentioned health care, when that is the big, looming, 800-pound gorilla in the room. People are anxious about this rollout of ObamaCare—first the Web site, then the cancellations, and then the sticker shock. People are worried about it. But the President waited 40 minutes into his State of the Union speech before even addressing it.

But here is what the President said to congressional Republicans. He said: If you have specific plans to cut costs, cover more people, and increase choice, tell America what you would do differently.

The problem is we have been telling the President since 2009, but he has refused to listen. He has refused to listen, and he is still refusing to listen.

The President went on to say that Republicans owe it to the American people to say what they are for, not just what they are against. I agree with the President, and we have, and continue to do so, but he continues not to listen.

Republicans have been offering health care alternatives for at least the last 5 years, most recently just earlier this week when three of my colleagues: Senator HATCH, Senator BURR, and Senator COBURN introduced a health reform blueprint that would reduce costs, expand quality insurance coverage, and improve patient access to doctors and hospitals. If President Obama wasn't aware of this, then perhaps he needs to spend a little more time outside the White House and the Democratic echo chamber and actually engage with Members of this side of the aisle in serious discussions. It is really easy to knock down a straw man, but only when it is not true. Given all the massive problems with the implementation of ObamaCare—not just with the Web site, not just with the cancellations, not just with the sticker shock or the fact you can't keep your doctors if you like them—and along with all of the massive problems still plaguing our economy and stalling wages, it is time for the President to show some real leadership. The way he could show that leadership is simply to get in a room with Members of the opposing party and to say: Let's figure this out.

This plan or this blueprint that Senators COBURN, BURR, and HATCH have introduced is just one of dozens of ideas that would actually bring down the

cost of health insurance, which would make it more affordable, and that means more people could buy it and more people would get covered. But the difference between our approach and the President's approach under ObamaCare is that under ObamaCare the government gets to choose, and under our alternatives individuals and families get to choose what is best for them.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Madam President, I rise today to express my support for the Agricultural Act of 2014, which is commonly known as the farm bill. It has been quite a journey over the past 3 years, and the bill before us is the result of many long hours of hard work. This bill, I understand, will be on the floor come Monday, and hopefully we will have a vote on final passage on this bill on Tuesday.

I believe this bill achieves the promise of reform while tackling the single largest domestic issue facing our country: The debt and the deficit. I commend Chairwoman STABENOW, Chairman LUCAS, Ranking Members COCHRAN and PETERSON, as well as my fellow conferees for finishing what has been a very difficult and complex task.

It is my sincere hope the Senate will adopt this bipartisan conference report, a bill that reforms critical farm programs, strengthens the Nation's food security, protects the livelihood of our farmers and ranchers and preserves our efforts to remain good stewards of the environment.

The bill not only works to protect producers in a time of need, but it also serves as a safety net for the nutritional well-being of low-income Americans. Our nutrition assistance programs play a key role in ensuring that needy Americans have access to the food they need to lead healthy, productive lives.

We have worked to find savings while still ensuring those in greatest need are provided a helping hand. I commend the important reinvestments made in this bill to local food banks which provide support for so many of our communities.

Agricultural producers face a combination of challenges, such as unpredictable weather, variable input costs and market volatility that all combine to determine profit or loss in any given year. The 2008 farm bill provided a strong safety net for producers, and I believe the farm bill before us adheres to and honors the same commitment we made 5 years ago in that farm bill.

Notably, Congress has taken a fresh look at our commodity programs. Maintaining an effective safety net is critical to America's farmers, and the bill before us eliminates direct payments while enhancing options for farmers to manage their risk. We do so in a way that doesn't disadvantage one region over another, a formula I thought was lacking in versions of this

bill in the last Congress. Since then, I have stressed to my colleagues the importance of producer choice, and I am truly pleased with the options that are built into this piece of legislation.

One part of this bill I am uniquely proud of concerns cotton, a crop that is particularly close to my heart and close to my home. More than any other part of this bill, the Upland cotton program represents fundamental reform. It meets our commitments in the World Trade Organization and will resolve our dispute with Brazil.

Moreover, our Nation's farmers and landowners deserve to have long-term conservation programs that have certainty to effectively and efficiently manage their land and resources for the years ahead. Locally led conservation is critical in supporting America's long-term environmental and economic stability. Not only do farm bill conservation programs play a key role in supporting clean air, clean water, and productive soils, they also help producers avoid unnecessary regulation and support our Nation's long-term economic and food security.

I also want to highlight language in this bill that links conservation compliance to crop insurance. My amendment led many leading agricultural, conservation, and crop insurance groups to come together and forge a compromise, ensuring crop insurance doesn't compromise our natural resources for generations to come. It also provides an opportunity for wildlife habitat to flourish and, thus, this farm bill is supported by virtually every hunting and fishing organization in the country.

While all of the regulatory issues I supported were not able to be included in the final conference report, I am happy that language was included to clarify forest roads are not point sources and are not subject to permit requirements under the Clean Water Act.

We must do what we can to protect producers, businesses, and all of our constituents from over-burdensome regulations coming out of EPA. After all, I am confident we have balanced the needs and interests between commodities and regions. Ultimately, the reason we are here is to represent those who work the land each and every day to ensure that Americans continue to have the highest quality agricultural products in the world.

Contrary to popular belief, food does not come from the grocery store. For every piece of fresh produce purchased, every pound of meat, every cotton t-shirt, and for every jar of peanut butter there is a farmer or a rancher somewhere in America working each and every day—and working very hard—to get it there. I hope that we never take for granted the ability to get safe quality food to stores across America for consumers to purchase.

This will be my fourth and final farm bill as a Member of Congress. As a former chairman and ranking member

of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, I am very proud of this bill and of all previous farm bills of which I have had the privilege to be a part.

As I have said, I have been around the country as a Member of Congress over the last 20 years. When I leave Congress, as I will at the end of this year, I want to make sure we have strong agricultural policies in place so that young people, such as my grandson John and my grandson Jay, if they make a decision to come back to the farm, will have an incentive to do so, and they will be able to provide a quality of life for their family very much like the quality of life they have today. Good agricultural policy will incentivize those young people to stay in rural America and on the farm, and I think this Farm bill does that.

There is no single piece of legislation that impacts as many people in my State as this one. I believe it is vitally important to the farmers, ranchers, and consumers of Georgia, as well as to those across this great Nation that we support this legislation.

In closing, let me say it has been my distinct honor to represent and work with the people, farmers, and ranchers of Georgia for 20 years. You provide the highest quality food, feed, and fiber in the world. Thanks for the opportunity to represent you in Congress and to be a member of what I think is an outstanding agricultural committee.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Madam President, before he leaves the floor, I wish to thank the Senator from Georgia through the Chair for all of his extraordinary leadership on the agriculture committee for so many years. As a new member of that committee, I saw firsthand how important he was to our getting to a compromise.

So through the Chair, I say thank you to the Senator for his great service, and particularly his great service to farmers and ranchers all across his home State and also across the great State of Colorado.

I too wish to speak today on this compromise bill, this bipartisan bill, this farm bill which has such a long history. In 2012 the Senate agriculture committee was the only committee in the entire Congress with a bipartisan deficit plan. It passed the Senate. The House didn't take it up. I think it was an enormous disservice to rural Americans that we didn't pass this bill 2 years ago, particularly when farmers and ranchers in my region are facing an unprecedented drought.

I distinctly remember being out during the summer of 2012 on the eastern plains and the western slope of Colorado right before the Presidential election. While this town was completely consumed with who was going to win that election, people in Colorado weren't talking about it at all. They were asking: Why in the world can't we

pass the farm bill through the Congress and get it to the President's desk?

Now finally, after a series of extensions and half measures, we actually got to a conference committee. I think it may be the only conference committee in this Congress. This is how we used to do business around here, I am told. I was glad to be a member of the one conference committee in this Congress. We got to committee on a long-term bill.

I have stood on this floor before talking about the land of flickering lights. This town has become a place where the standard of success is keeping the lights on for 2 more weeks or 2 more months. Here we have an honest-to-goodness 5-year farm bill.

Agreed to by both Republicans and Democrats, it has now been passed by the House of Representatives, and next week we will have a chance to pass it here. Thanks to the tireless work of Chairwoman STABENOW, Ranking Member COCHRAN, and the other conferees, we now will have the chance to vote.

Our rural communities are demanding the certainty that comes with a long-term bill. Under the last farm bill—and history ought to be our guide here—our farmers and ranchers were remarkably productive. They delivered the strongest 5-year stretch of farm exports in the history of the United States of America. Now it is time to make some reforms to farm policy and to once again give rural America the stability it needs to provide food, fuel, and fiber to the Nation.

This bill reflects the values and process we want to see in other areas of the budget. We came together as Republicans and Democrats to identify priorities, to streamline duplication, to get rid of things we didn't need to do anymore, and to focus in the areas that were important—to break away from old, inefficient habits, to eliminate for the first time direct payments issued to farmers regardless of economic needs or market signals. That is a significant reform.

This bill prioritizes what is working for producers instead; namely, crop insurance, which is a large part of what keeps farmers and rural economies in business in this country, and that is why it is a priority.

Beyond crop insurance, another key highlight of this bill is the great tools it includes for livestock. It includes resources for much-needed livestock disaster programs that are critical to southeast Colorado, where ranchers are battling dry conditions we haven't seen since the dust bowl.

When I visited last August, producers who are facing stubbornly persistent drought and feed shortages told me that nearly 70 percent of their livestock had been liquidated or relocated from the region in just 2 years. That is part of a boom and bust cycle that comes with our livestock industry which makes it difficult to build for the future. This farm bill couldn't come sooner for Colorado's ranchers.

Beyond livestock disaster, there is a lot to support our ranching community in this bill. We have included a revamped conservation title—and I chair that subcommittee—which will keep our ranching lands in the West in their current state, rather than being divided for development.

The conference report also carries over important conservation title reforms from the Senate bill. Notably, it carries forward a Senate provision to ensure that recipients of government-supported crop insurance comply with basic conservation requirements. That measure was the result of a historic agreement between the commodity groups and our conservation groups. It is supported by a wide variety of people, from the Farm Bureau to the National Wildlife Federation.

This revamped conservation title is huge for rural America. It is huge for farming and ranching families looking to keep their land and agriculture. It is huge for sportsmen. It is huge for anyone who cares about the long-term health of our soil, our air, and our water. I thank again the groups who traditionally represent producers and the groups who traditionally represent the environmental community and conservationists and sportsmen for coming together on commonsense reforms. These conservation measures will help us improve the efficiency and production of agriculture and improve the quality of the environment in farm country.

We recognize that keeping these landscapes in their historical undeveloped state is an economic driver—for our State, anyway, and I suspect for many States—for tourism and for wildlife habitat.

As I have traveled the State of Colorado, farmers and ranchers are constantly talking to me about the importance of conservation and their commitment to be stewards of the land for the next generation. They highlighted in particular conservation easements which provide the Department of Agriculture assistance to help landowners voluntarily conserve the farming and ranching heritage of their land. I will spend a couple of minutes sharing a story I have told on this floor before about one of the many Coloradans who have benefited from the easement program.

This is a picture of the Music Meadows Ranch. I actually liked this photo so much when I was on the floor the last time with it that I now have a copy of it hanging in my office here in Washington. It is outside of Westcliffe, CO, which is at an elevation of 9,000 feet. There are 4,000 acres in the ranch. Elin Ganschow raises some of the finest grass-fed beef in the country on this family ranch. Thanks to the grassland reserve program, Elin's ranch now has a permanent conservation easement, providing critical wildlife habitat for elk, mule deer, black bear, and mountain lions—species prized by Colorado's sportsmen—that contribute millions to our State's economy. Thanks

to an amendment included in the conference report, we will see even more of these easements happen on high-priority landscapes such as the Music Meadows Ranch.

It is critical to our legacy and to the next generation of Coloradans to make sure we can find a way, when the land prices are rising the way they are, to keep farms and ranches in the hands of our family farmers and our family ranches. That is what this bill will help us do.

I thank Chairwoman STABENOW and Senator COCHRAN for working with me to get that amendment approved and carried into the final bill. I thank all the Colorado ranchers, sportsmen, and advocates of the outdoors for their support in drafting this legislation.

Also important to the West, this legislation makes great strides on forest help. This is a huge issue for Colorado and all Western States as we deal with terrible droughts, overgrown forests, and massive wildfires—a number of which have occurred in Colorado.

This conference report gives the Forest Service new tools to treat areas in need of restoration, like acreage suffering from the bark beetle epidemic that has ravaged Colorado.

The forestry title also reauthorizes important programs such as stewardship contracting and so-called good neighbor authority for our national forests.

So all in all, I again say thank you to my colleagues on the committee for working so hard together, for acknowledging regional interests that we have in the West which may not be shared with everybody. Although anybody who is downstream from Colorado—and that is basically the entire country—ought to care about forest health in Colorado and ought to care about water quality in Colorado. I think we were heard in this bill, and I deeply appreciate that.

The final point I would make is something which just came up in the last 2 weeks and we were able to resolve. We had an appropriations bill which passed a couple of weeks ago that failed to include a very important provision to States that have a high percentage of their land occupied with Federal land, and that is the so-called PILT payments, payment in lieu of taxes.

The program helps rural counties containing Federal land within their boundaries offset the revenue they lose because they can't derive property taxes from their land. Dozens of Colorado counties derive significant portions of their operating budget from PILT. By the way, they use those operating budgets to help maintain a lot of these Federal assets out there by, for example, providing search and rescue missions. I can say, most of the people they are rescuing are not even from Colorado.

So I am very grateful to Chairwoman STABENOW for working with me and other Senators from the West to in-

clude a PILT extension in the conference report. It is only 1 year, however. Unlike the 5-year farm bill, this is not going to give us the predictability that we need. I will continue to work with my senior Senator, Mr. UDALL, and others to make sure people hear the voice of the West in this Chamber.

Finally, this bill reduces the deficit by \$23 billion. As I said, it is going to bring certainty and continued prosperity to rural America. From our forests, to our farms, to our ranches and rural communities, it is long overdue.

This bill has been supported across my home State of Colorado, from the orchards of the Grand Valley, to the wheat fields of Washington County, and on the editorial pages of the Greeley Tribune and the Denver Post.

This is a good bill. It passed the House with strong bipartisan support, and I urge a yes vote when we take up the farm bill conference report next week.

Madam President, I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. WARREN). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I wish to share some remarks this afternoon concerning a very important issue; that is, the financial condition of working Americans. Things are not good for them at this point in time.

Just a few weeks ago on January 5, Gene Sperling, the key economic adviser to President Barack Obama, appeared on CNN's "Face the Nation." He said most of the people are desperately looking for jobs.

... our economy still has three people looking for every job opening.

It has been reported that the House is having a retreat today and that they are discussing whether to proceed with immigration reform—apparently it would have to be somewhat like what passed the Senate or it would have no chance of passing the Senate—and they want to move this bill to try to solve a problem out there, but I think it is not practical at this point in time.

I wish to share some thoughts about what we should consider as we evaluate what the proper immigration flow into the United States is at this time. We are a nation that is founded on immigrants. We believe in that. We admit 1 million people a year lawfully now, and that is the largest number of any country in the world. We are about at the point—and I think we have reached it—where we have the largest percentage of foreign born in the history of the United States.

We hear advice from certain businesses. Despite Mr. Sperling's statement that there are three applicants

for every job opening—we have advice of a different kind out of the business community: this is a post from the CEO of Marriott Hotels. Mr. Bill Marriott, by all accounts, is a fine citizen. He says the House is ready to tackle immigration. He said: "As unemployment inches downward, we also need a functioning immigration system that helps us staff positions that might otherwise go unfilled."

Apparently, he would like to have even more applicants for positions at his hotels and would probably suggest that the Republic would be in great danger if there is not somebody available at every one of his hotel resorts to roll down somebody's covers and put a chocolate drop on it. I don't know if that is the No. 1 challenge America faces at this time.

The Financial Times of London says that business groups are pushing Republicans for immigration reform.

I just want to talk about the economics of massive immigration. We need to understand it, and we need to understand it clearly. The proper flow of immigration into America is good for our country, but we need to be careful about this—particularly at a time of financial stress for millions of Americans who can't get a job or who can only get a part-time job or who have not seen their wages increase for many years.

Responsible immigration, I would suggest first and foremost, should help the economy, not hurt it. The great public policy question of immigration reform is now before the House, and given the poor state of the economy and the abysmal condition of the Federal budget, immigration reform has become a cutting-edge debate, and a vigorous national discussion about our country's economic future and reform of the Federal programs that are driving unsustainable annual deficits.

Significantly increasing the inflow of immigrants into our country at this time would adversely shock an already weak economy, lower average wages, increase unemployment, and decrease each American's prosperity and share of total output. As experts tell us, the GDP, growth of America's economy per capita, will decline if the bill that was introduced in the Senate were to become law and pass the Senate.

The Congressional Budget Office—our own experts, the people who advise us—reported in its evaluation the Senate's effort to increase immigration substantially. So the immigration reform was touted as a tough immigration bill that was going to end all kinds of problems, but it dramatically increased the amount of immigration.

They evaluated this bill and found that the economy would indeed grow bigger because it would contain more people, but it would not be a stronger economy for Americans. GDP per person would actually decline. So that means the relative financial position of each American here would decline if the legislation were passed based on

the careful analysis of the Congressional Budget Office.

Considering the acute current weaknesses of labor markets and the slowest economic recovery from a recession since the end of World War II, the last thing the U.S. economy needs is a handicap—much less an enormous harmful economic shock.

We still have not seen job markets recover to 2007 levels—6 years after the start of the recession. Our economy still has three people looking for every job opening. President Obama's advisers have said that labor markets still have not recovered. A significant expansion of the flow of immigrants into America would be occurring at a time of substantial weakness in labor markets.

It is not the unemployment rate that is so definitive. It is the number of people who are actually able to find a job and are working. The current economic recovery has been too slow to produce an economic rebound. We still have fewer jobs than we had in 2007, when the recession began, even though the population increased each year.

This chart is about employment as a share of the population. It shows at the period of the recession that we had this rapid drop from 63 percent of the population working down to a little above 58 percent, and it stuck there and still there today. This represents millions of people who are not working today because they cannot find a job.

The concept that we would bring in more foreign workers to take the very limited number of jobs we have, and increasing our flow over the normal generous flow, makes no sense to me. I don't see how it can be defended intellectually. It might give Mr. Marriott the ability to have more cheap labor, and he may have to pay less to get somebody to work at his resorts, but that is not our problem. Our problem and our challenge is to help the average American citizen live a better life, and we are not doing that effectively. It has not happened, and this is years into this post-recession recovery—the so-called recovery.

The economy has produced 4.7 million jobs since the recovery began in 2009. There are 6.3 million people who have dropped out of the workforce. They have given up. They are discouraged workers who ceased to look for a job and do not show up on the unemployment rolls.

Some of them have taken disability. Some of them took early retirement. Some of them just quit. Maybe they have a spouse who is working and they are no longer able to work. This is an amazing statistic that dropouts exceed newly employed. This is unprecedented in the post-World War II period.

As of the end of 2013, 58.6 percent of the adult population was employed. This is down from 62.7 percent at the start of the recession. The percentage has been stuck at about 58.6 percent since September of 2009. It has not improved since 2009. If the same percent-

age of the population worked today as was working at the start of the recession, we would have 10 million more jobs. We would have 10 million more people working, 10 million more people able to support their families better, 10 million more people who are perhaps not on welfare than there are today.

In 2007, there were 146 million Americans employed. Today there are 144.6 million employed. At the same time, the population of those older than 16 years of age has grown by 13.5 million. So while the population is increasing, the number of people actually working is lower than it was in 2007.

Moreover, there has been no growth in the income of working Americans. Working American families are stressed. Jobs just are not being created at nearly the rate to keep up with the population, and millions are simply dropping out. To make matters even worse, the Census Bureau reported in August of 2013 that the incomes of working families have been in decline since 2007, adjusting for inflation.

This chart shows that it has been a fairly steady decline over a long period of time.

Look at this chart. A median income in 2012 dollars—constant dollars—was \$56,000 in 1999. Today, in 2012, it is down to \$51,000. That is a dramatic reduction in the average net income of American workers. Someone says: What does that have to do with immigration? I will discuss it. It is a factor in what is happening. It just is.

What does CBO say about immigration and wages? It is against this difficult economic backdrop that immigration reformers want to massively increase the number of work visas—doubling them—by increasing the flow of migrants and legalizing those in the country without documents. Basically, we would increase the current flow of legal immigrants to America from 10 million over 10 years to 30 million, and who would get permanent resident status in the United States, over a 10-year period. Each of those 30 million would be available to compete for any job in the marketplace. Having come from poor countries, many of them are glad to take a job for even the most minimum of wages. That is understandable. We respect that. I am not criticizing them; I am talking about the policy of the U.S. Congress and the President of the United States.

CBO found that an increase of this kind, if the bill that passed the Senate had become law, would do a number of things. No. 1, it would depress wages among low- and high-skilled native-born workers—depress wages, further, across the entire economy. That is what they reported to us. That is their official analysis.

They went on to say, No. 2, it would raise the national unemployment rate and increase the number of people unemployed.

No. 3, it would slow the growth of per capita output.

There may be someone who says this isn't so and insists it is not so. But I

would suggest if we bring more iron ore into America, the price of iron ore declines. If we bring in more cotton, the price of cotton declines. If we bring in more textiles, the price of textiles declines. And if we bring in more labor, the price of labor declines. That is what the facts are. It is a matter of economics. It hasn't been repealed. It is amazing to me that some of our CEOs and some of our free market geniuses don't understand that simple fact.

What about depressing wages? The Congressional Budget Office concluded, based on extensive academic evidence, that low- and high-skilled native-born workers would compete at a wage disadvantage with similarly skilled immigrant workers.

CBO wrote:

Based on CBO's reading of that research, a 1-percent increase in the labor force attributable to immigration has tended to lower the relative wages for all workers with less than a high school diploma by roughly three-tenths of 1 percent . . . and to lower the relative wages for workers with at least a college degree by one-tenth of a percent.

CBO's analysis of S. 744, the bill that passed the Senate, shows that average wages across the entire economy are lower for the first 12 years of this policy change.

All right. So what CBO said: If we pass this bill that passed the Senate, it will lower wages across the entire economy for 12 years.

Is it not the deep, fundamental responsibility of the Members of this Senate to be attuned to and concerned about the wages of working Americans? And should we not immediately reject, at a time of low wages, declining wages, any policy our CBO tells us—certainly correctly—will pull down further the wages of American workers, at a time when we have record unemployment, record numbers of people outside the workforce? How simple is this for us to understand? I cannot comprehend what it is that this Congress is thinking.

Professor George Borjas, of Harvard, the leading expert in the world, I think, on immigration and wages, recently noted that immigration from 1960 through 2012, which is the last year he had data, has cost native-born workers an of \$402 billion. Where did that money go, according to Professor Borjas? It went to the corporate profits in almost the exact same amount. He says that native-owned firms would gain \$437 billion in income. So they would have their income increase and almost the entirety of that increase in income is paid for by the reduction in wages of their workers.

Right now, we have healthy profits but not healthy wages. Look at this chart which points that out. This growth in profits is directly caused by the advantage that accrues to a business out doing what it is supposed to do, which is try to produce widgets at the lowest possible price and make the best profits it can make for their stockholders, and pay people competitive wages. When there are a lot more

workers applying for jobs, they don't have to pay as high wages as they would if there weren't that many people applying for jobs.

I am not criticizing business. What I am saying is that as a matter of national policy, shouldn't it be our policy to listen to people such as Professor Borjas who studied this issue and tells us there is a direct relationship between declining wages and the number of immigrants we have coming into our country? I am not demeaning a single person who wants to come to America to work. I am just talking about facts.

In other words, Professor Borjas finds the increase for business is almost entirely paid for by the decline in wages for working Americans.

The problem today is declining wages for working Americans a lot more than it is about profits. I don't have any problem with corporate profits. I wish corporate profits were higher. But we should not be setting up economic factors and creating economic conditions that exacerbate an income problem that we have in America. That is all I am saying. I think American workers have a right to demand it, and they understand this. Maybe some of our geniuses don't understand it. Some have political gains they look for out of this. Some have economic gains they look for out of this. But somebody better be dealing with the concerns of the people in our country who are hurting.

Professor Borjas found that the impact of increased immigration from 1980 to 2000 resulted in a 3-percent decrease in the wage of average native workers and an 8-percent decrease in the wage of high school dropouts—those who don't have a high school degree. The poorest workers in America suffered the greatest amount during that 20-year period based on census data, empirical data, that he can defend.

As a matter of fact, this chart is a recent chart. Professor Borjas presented a paper to a large group of economists in June of last year—last summer—and to my knowledge, nobody challenged it then or since.

So a 10-percent increase in the size of a skill group—that is high school dropouts, for example—reduces the wages of that group significantly.

Professor Borjas wrote:

Immigration has its largest negative impact on the wage of native workers who lack a high school diploma, a group that makes up a modest (and, in recent decades, shrinking) share of the workforce. These workers are among the poorest Americans. The children of these workers make up a disproportionate number of the children in poverty: 24.8 percent of all children of the native-born working poor live in households headed by a high school dropout.

That is what he said, not me. I think the economics has not been disputed and it is just common sense.

Professor Borjas is not alone in these findings. I would note Professor Borjas, I believe, was born in Cuba and came to this country as a young man, as an immigrant. Similar results were found by

economists at the Federal Reserve Bank in Atlanta. They had a look at it. The prominent labor economist David Card of the University of California-Berkeley reached similar conclusions.

However, it is not only lower wages that working Americans have to bear, but it will be higher unemployment as well.

The rapid increase in the immigrant population, especially those in the low-skilled segment of the income distribution, will overwhelm the ability of the economy to produce jobs and increase wages. Thus, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that S. 744, the bill that passed the Senate, would raise the number of unemployed Americans during the first 5 years by an average annual number of 162,000, and that unemployment would "remain elevated through 2020."

This is a stunning conclusion, especially when compared with what CBO argued in its 2013 Outlook. In their Budget and Economic Outlook of February 2013—just last February—CBO projected—get this—in their projections last year about how many additional jobs would be created per month for the next 5 years, they projected we would only create 75,000 jobs a month.

I don't know what the future holds, but we are not seeing the kind of job growth we expected. This past December, the job growth was 74,000—well below the 200,000 or so we need to just have a modest increase in the number of working Americans. So CBO projects a 162,000 reduction annually in the number of people who would be getting jobs in America as a result of the passage of this bill, and we are only going to create 75,000 a month. That is a serious hammer blow to working Americans and their ability to get a job. In other words, CBO's estimated increase in unemployed Americans will equal about a full month of average employment gain for the first 5 years after enactment. At today's job growth rate, that additional unemployment is like losing about a month of job gains every year.

What about economic output? As one might expect, the lower wages and higher unemployment reflect an economy that is not growing fast enough to absorb all of the new workers we have in the country now who become work-age eligible. While the size of the economy expands under the Senate's bill, because of the larger population, the growth rate is not fast enough to raise wages or lower unemployment. CBO estimates that GNP per capita will fall below baseline; that is, without passage of the immigration bill. So if we pass the immigration bill, the GNP—gross national product—of America per person, per capita, will be lower and stay lower until 2030, than it would be if the bill didn't pass at all.

President Obama, talked to us the other night about his concern over wages, and I would suggest the first thing he needs to do is to revise his commitment to the passage of the Sen-

ate immigration bill and quit pushing for it, because it is guaranteed to have a negative impact on jobs and GDP per capita in America. It just is. It is something I hope all of us will consider.

I know the House wants to do the right thing. I know they want to reach out and be a positive force in America. I know a lot of our Senators felt the same way. But they weren't focused on the realities and the impacts that the legislation, if passed, would have. It would lower wages, it would increase unemployment, and it would reduce the growth in the economy per person over the next almost 30 years.

This not what we can afford to do now, colleagues. So I urge all of us to be honest about this and do the right thing. I know there are big businesses that want this. I know there are political interest groups that want this. I know some of the Democratic leaders want this real badly, and we have special activist groups that have one reason or another to favor virtually open borders in America.

We cannot go in that direction. It is not good for our constituents, for the people who sent us here to serve the national interests.

I will just propose that instead of taking steps that are guaranteed, documented to make things worse, let's do a few things to make things better, things that would make jobs better and more profitable in America, without adding to the debt of the United States, which in itself is hurting the American economy.

We need more American energy that creates good-paying jobs right here in America. We need a more competitive tax and regulatory code that allows businesses and workers to compete in the global marketplace. We need a good trade policy that increases our exports and expands domestic manufacturing and demands that U.S. manufacturers and workers have their products fairly competed with on a level playing field around the world—fair trade as well as free trade. We need an immigration policy that serves the interests of the American people, as I have just noted. We need to convert the welfare office from a check-delivering institution to a job-creating, job-training center to help move people into jobs and help them become employed at better wages.

We need to make the government of this country leaner and more accountable to the taxpayers so that it produces more for every tax dollar that is extracted from the American public. We have an obligation to produce for the money they give us, and we are not being very productive by any fair analysis. We need to restore economic confidence by continuing our effort to produce a balanced budget.

Madam President, I appreciate the opportunity to share these thoughts. I believe what I have said represents one of the most significant public policy issues facing our country today. We need to understand what we are doing.

We need to understand the impact of our legislation. If we take the time to do so, we will recognize that when we reform immigration, and it must be quite different from that which would be done if the Senate bill were to become law.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, since the failure of the gun bill on the floor of the Senate, I have tried to come to the floor every week or so to talk about the voices of the thousands of victims who have died from gun violence all across this country. About 30 people a day—not even counting suicides—die from gun violence. It is a travesty, it is a tragedy, it is a scourge on our country, and it is inflicting pain in our cities, in our suburbs, and the Senate and the House of Representatives—the most deliberative, the most representative bodies in the history of the world—are doing absolutely nothing about it.

If you want to know why it continues, we can give a long list of reasons. There is no one panacea to solve the problem of gun violence. It is about tightening our gun laws. It is about better mental health programming, more funding. It is about addressing a culture of violence. But it is also about a signal that we send here, a signal of complicity.

Our silence essentially sends a message to young men and women all across this country that we must be OK, we must be all right with epidemic levels of gun violence if the numbers continue to spiral upwards and we do absolutely nothing about it.

The statistics alone tell you we should step to the plate and change our laws, address the problem, give new resources. But seeing that those numbers and that data have not really moved the Senate to action, maybe the voices of the victims will.

A lot of attention here in the greater Washington area was paid to a seemingly random shooting without apparent motive in a suburban Maryland mall on Saturday, January 25.

A gunman came in, a 19-year-old with a shotgun, and sprayed bullets into a Zumiez store, which is a store that sells clothing and merchandise for skateboarders and snowboarders.

He killed Brianna Benlolo and Tyler Johnson, two people he apparently had no connection to.

Brianna was 21 years old, and she left behind a little 2-year-old boy Elijah. Her friends who worked at the mall with her said Brianna was “really proud of her job.” They spoke about

how positive she was. One friend said “she never seemed like she had any negativity.” She left behind a little notebook that she had filled with fanciful drawings and phrases from pop culture. She was a really, really happy young woman who was raising a really, really happy little boy. Little 2-year-old Elijah is never going to get to see his mother again because of a seemingly random, unprovoked act of violence in another mass shooting.

Tyler Johnson had had a tough life. He had had a history of substance abuse. But he had been clean from drugs and alcohol for 2 years, and he had pretty much completely turned his life around. He was working, earning a paycheck at this store at the mall. But then, after work, he had become a board member at a local 12-step recovery house called the Serenity Center in Columbia, and he was now all about the business of mentoring other young people to make sure they would not fall into the same cycle of abuse of drugs and alcohol that he had.

The president of Serenity Center said:

I thought he was a remarkable young man. I don't see a lot of young people stepping up like that. I just thought he was an up-and-coming leader.

We are desperate in this country to have these kinds of role models such as Tyler Johnson—somebody who had struggled with dependence and had not only conquered it for himself but then had gone out and set himself about being a role model.

The difference that Tyler Johnson could have made—Tyler was 25 years old. Tyler was not even halfway through his life, and he had decided he was going to spend his life turning people's lives around. He had decided he was going to go back and get a degree that would help him become a counselor for young people.

We lost maybe 50 years of life transformations because Tyler Johnson is gone. Tyler Johnson was going to help turn kids' lives around, to get them back on the straight and narrow path like he did, but we do not get that benefit any longer because of another mass shooting at a Maryland mall.

When you read these obituaries and horrific newspaper articles about shooting after shooting, as I have since I became so personally connected to this issue in the wake of the shooting in Sandy Hook that took Dylan Hockley's life and Daniel Barden's life and Jesse Lewis's life and Ben Wheeler's life, you see how casual the violence is. Chad Oulson lost his life on January 13 of this year in Wesley Chapel, FL.

Chad was going to see a new movie. I have not seen it, but I have heard it is pretty good: “Lone Survivor.” He was texting his 3-year-old daughter, as the previews were playing. One of the movie patrons did not like the fact that Chad was texting during the previews of the movie. So he confronted Chad about it. They had an argument.

They had an altercation. This guy left the theater to go get a security guard. When he returned, he came back alone. He took out a gun, and he shot Chad.

Chad was struck in the chest and died. His wife was hit in the hand and suffered injuries. An off-duty police officer and two nurses who happened to be in the theater ensured there were no more shots fired. They tried to resuscitate Chad until the paramedics arrived.

His family members said he was just a good all-around guy. He was the father of a beautiful little girl—a girl he was texting with at the time of his murder. “You'd be hard-pressed to find somebody who didn't like him,” somebody said. “He was a friend to everybody, whoever he met.”

Two days later, in Dallas, TX, Trinidad Salazar was killed over a dispute about roof shingles. There was a dispute as to whether he owned these shingles or whether another guy owned the shingles, and this 38-year-old guy decided the best way to resolve the dispute over who owned these roof shingles was to shoot 33-year-old Trinidad Salazar. A .40 caliber Glock pistol was pulled out. He fired one warning shot into the ground, and then fired one shot directly into Trinidad, and Trinidad, at 30 years old, is no longer with us.

The casualness and the randomness of this gun violence makes it even harder to take. It is not that you can ever defend this kind of carnage. But when no one can see it coming, when it becomes the result of simple arguments over housing materials or nuisances in movie theaters or items of clothing, it just makes it even more absurd that we do not step to the plate and do something about it.

In 2013—the year after Sandy Hook happened—we paid even more attention to school shootings. So when one came across our transom, when we saw evidence or reports of shootings on TV, we all paid attention. Over the course of 2013, there were 28 school shootings. Madam President, 28 school shootings happened in 2013—the year after Sandy Hook. That is a lot.

We are 28 days into 2014, and in those 28 days we have had 11 school shootings. We had 28 in all of 2013. We have had 11 school shootings in just the first month of 2014 alone. We are on pace—we are on pace—to have over 120 school shootings this year.

On January 9, in Jackson, TN; on January 13, in New Haven, CT; on January 14, in Roswell, NM; on January 17, in Philadelphia, PA; on January 17, in Albany, GA; on January 20, at Widener University; on January 21, at Purdue University; again on January 21, at Wakefield Elementary, in Turlock, CA; on January 24, at South Carolina State University; on January 27, in Carbondale, IL; on January 28, in Honolulu, HI—luckily, each one of them—“luckily,” that is a terrible word to use—in each one of these school shootings there have only been one or two or three people shot or injured. But it is

just a matter of time before there is another Sandy Hook. When you are having school shootings at the rate of one every two school days, it is just a matter of time before somebody continues to pull that trigger over and over or someone does not intervene as quickly as they intervened in these situations.

If we do not recognize the trend that is developing, if we do not at least send a message that the Senate and the House do not condone with our silence these acts, then it will just continue to happen.

I am not suggesting that there is a magical act of Congress that we can pass that is going to end gun violence in this country or, frankly, that is going to stop people with deep psychological illnesses from walking into malls and churches and schools occasionally and firing weapons.

But we can take steps to make sure it does not happen as often. We can take steps to make sure the carnage is not as bad or as significant when someone decides to walk into a crowded place and do that kind of damage. That is within our power. That is something on which Republicans and Democrats should be able to agree.

I will continue to come down to the floor to tell the stories of the voices of the victims until we can find the ability to reach across party lines and do something to at least send a message that the Senate stands against the developing, awful, terrible trend of mass violence in this country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I want to talk about the farm bill that will be on the floor—is on the floor, that we will vote on sometime next week. I would also predict that this is the last farm bill that will not be driven by the new realities of people who want their food needs met in new ways. These food needs are going to be greater, but we are going to be less concerned, I would expect, 5 years from now about farm surpluses and what happens if we grow too much than we are about how we meet the growing food needs of the world, partially because of population, partially because people, once they get better food, want the better food. Once you have got the variety of food, once you have had the experience of better food, nobody wants to go back to the food they used to have. We are going to see that driving this debate more over the next few years than we have up until now.

Agriculture in many States, including my State of Missouri, is the No. 1 industry. Sixteen percent of our workforce is directly involved in agriculture. It continues in State after State where the Presiding Officer and I both hear that every Senator represents an agricultural State. I think every Senator represents a State where agriculture is a significant part of what we do, as it has always been part

of what we do. Fewer people participate directly on the production end of agriculture, but, of course, everybody participates on the consumption end of agriculture.

In America, agriculture directly supports 16 million jobs which are just involved in how we grow and process what we have. Farm families in Missouri, farm families nationwide, work each and every day to feed the country. More and more are focused on what it takes also to feed the world.

For 2 years now we have been in a temporary farm bill. In some cases, the assistance that government has given and will give again with the passage of this bill has not even been there for the last 2 years. When I talk in a few minutes about livestock disaster, that program went away in 2011 as we were facing some of the most difficult times in a long time.

The drought has been worse in many States than anytime since the 1950s. Programs that would deal with that have not dealt with that. But the investment in this bill will reaffirm our commitment to being at the forefront of productive agriculture. It will provide rural communities the ability to compete both here and abroad. Certainly, it is not perfect. I think while it may not be the best possible bill, I would say as I said 2 years ago when I voted for that interim bill, it is the best bill possible right now.

As we all know, the leaders on the agriculture committees in the House and the Senate have spent a long time trying to bring this bill together. If it were easy, they would have done it quicker. They did not come back earlier than everybody else did during the recent break because they wanted to be back early; they came back because that discussion had not brought itself to a final bill yet.

But this is the bill. It does some good things. It provides a certainty and a safety net for farm families. Very few farm families at some point in the productive cycle of a year do not have to go to the banker and say: We need to borrow some money to make something possible in this planning year that we could not do without borrowed money. Here is how we are going to pay it back. Well, "here is how we are going to pay it back" is a whole lot better if you say: Here is the safety net. Here is what happens if things that we do not expect to go wrong go wrong. Here is what happens if we have to actually use the crop insurance. Here is how we will pledge to you that we will, of course, have crop insurance when you make this loan. So this bill provides that and gives a 5-year place to look.

My mom and dad were dairy farmers. I have some sense of understanding how farm families work and think. Knowing how you can look at the rules and regulations 5 years in advance is a whole lot better than looking 5 months in advance or 2 years in advance. We have gone through a period where farm

families have not known for a long time now what the long-term government commitment to agriculture is. When we pass this bill, we are going to have that longer commitment for the first time in a while.

This supports our export opportunities. It finds ways that allow us to get more easily into markets that the people in those countries want us to be in, because what we produce is something they need, they want, they know they would like to have. "USA" stamped on a truck, on a bin, on a container, is a seal of approval all over the world.

This expands bioenergy production, not for the bioenergy things that are out there already in a proven way, but expanding bioenergy in places we know it needs to be expanded. This is the bill that we invest in rural communities.

Eighty percent of this bill is now in nutrition programs that affect people in the most urban parts of our country and in rural parts of our country. But the 20 percent that includes the crop insurance and other programs—I think crop insurance is about 4 percent of the entire bill here. We see people who are critical of how government is doing too much to help farm families, although they usually say—they usually assume that all farm families are big corporate farmers. But just 4 percent or so of the bill is that.

In the 20 percent that deals with rural America, it is things such as economic development that allow people to continue to compete and be in rural America. This gives our colleges and universities and the land grants principally, but the nonland grants who have an agricultural mission, the things they need, the tools they need, and research.

I think researchers were trying to figure out how to be sure that our products are as healthy and helpful to the people who consume them as possible. That is good. This bill does that by securing at the same time some real cost savings. There is about \$23 billion of deficit reduction because of the reforms in this bill, that which we have done in the past that we no longer believe we have to do for farm families to be competitive. I think 5 years from now we can look at this again and assume that the world marketplace allows us to look at farming in a new way.

I would like to discuss a couple of important issues that are addressed in this bill. One is research; the other is livestock disaster assistance. In 2012, about 80 percent of the agricultural land in America experienced a drought. It was the most extensive drought in our country since the 1950s.

In Missouri, all 114 counties were declared disaster areas because of that drought. Many with those persistently dry conditions were ranked among the very worst in the country. We grow lots of livestock in our State—lots of livestock of all kinds, particularly cattle, beef and dairy cattle. We have livestock, we have other livestock that is a

little easier to both categorize and contain and know everything you would want to know about.

But these industries did not have the kind of risk management programs they needed. For whatever reason, in the last farm bill, the livestock assistance programs, the livestock disaster programs—that is all they are; they are not to help in good times, they are purely to help in bad times. Those programs expired in 2011, just at the time when we had some of the worst livestock conditions we have had in over 50 years. So there was nothing there for those livestock producers. They were forced to liquidate their herds, resulting in the lowest cattle numbers since 1952.

What does that mean, the lowest cattle numbers since 1952? It means we have fewer cattle, obviously. But it also means that the replacement of the herd is going to be harder, not as many mother cows, not as many calves. Beef shelves in grocery stores will reflect these cattle numbers for a long time because people had to sell their herds.

In our State alone, there were 300,000 fewer cattle than there were a couple of years ago. It is the lowest number of cattle, in fact, single-year decline since the mid-1980s. It takes a long time to come back from that decline and have the numbers of cattle available for feedlots, for buyers, and eventually for the grocery store shelves than we would have had otherwise.

I am pleased the farm bill makes these programs permanent, but, again, they are permanent programs that only occur if you have extraordinary disaster circumstances that make them occur.

Thanks to smart investment in research, we have the safest, most affordable and abundant food supply in the world. We make smart investment in research. This is not a new commitment by the Federal Government. It goes back to 1862 when President Lincoln signed the bill that created the Department of Agriculture. One of the principal purposes for the Department of Agriculture was research that could be shared so that every farmer or every State or every community did not have to do their own research but research would be shared by the Department of Agriculture, encouraged by the Department of Agriculture, done in a way that met the needs of the whole country.

Research continues to produce great results. In 1940, 1 farmer fed 19 people. This year, 1 farmer feeds about 155 people. By 2050, global food demand is expected to increase by about 70 percent, and to double shortly after that. The American farmer is the best farmer in the world at producing quality products that are desired to meet that growing food need. If world food needs double between now and some date shortly after 2050, that means we need to produce as much food in the second half of this century in any given year as we have produced—if 10,000 years of

agricultural research has brought us to what we produce today, we need to double that in about the next 50 years.

It is incumbent upon us to make sure we have the tools available to do that. As the ranking member of the agricultural appropriations Committee, certainly research has been critical to our committee. I am glad the farm bill authorizes these research programs and allows us to continue to encourage research that will enable us to do what we need to do to meet our own food needs and world food needs.

Agricultural research lets us have more efficient production, ways to eradicate pests and disease. It addresses the adverse weather conditions the crops grow in. Africa as a continent is not in the food production role it needs to be, if by 2050 the projection is half of the people in the world will live in Africa. It is in our best interest to see them produce more food as well.

Of course, it is in our best interests to maintain a safe food supply. Agricultural research can aid small farmers. We can see ag research that adds value to staple crops and adds nutrients to staple crops in countries that grow a lot and have a lot of it, but, frankly, it may not have much food value, even though it may be most of what people eat.

The Danforth Plant Science Center in St. Louis conducts critical research to do just that, to look at a staple crop in a developing country and figure how that crop can be changed in a way that is beneficial to people who are used to it, who can grow it, but need to figure out how to select the best of those plants to replant next year.

Research into nutrient fortification, drought resistance, disease, and other things is important. The farm bill takes that step.

The chairwoman of the committee and the ranking member of the committee, our friends the Senators from Michigan and Mississippi, have worked hard to bring this bill forward.

I close by saying again, I predict that as world food needs and 21st century opportunities for agriculture change, that is going to define the debate 5 years from now, well below what we are likely to anticipate. It is no longer going to be a world that is driven about how do we sell the crops we grow, it is going to be much more driven by how do we grow the crops the world needs and Americans need, and how do we connect that result to the market that needs it.

American farmers for a long time have struggled with how productive they were in a world that maybe didn't need everything we could grow. That is not going to be the case in the very near future. I believe by the time we get to the end of this 5-year farm bill, we are going to have a very different discussion about how we meet our own food needs, world food needs, and the great opportunity in agriculture, agriculture business, and competition—that nobody does better than the American farmer.

I intend to support this bill next week.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. McCAIN. I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

IRAQ

Mr. McCAIN. I attended, as did all of my colleagues, the President's State of the Union Message the night before last. Obviously, as always, the President delivers an excellent speech.

I must say that in the years I have attended the President's State of the Union Message, I have never seen a message on national security and foreign policy as disconnected from reality as the President's speech. Obviously it had minor importance by the amount of time that was taken in the speech, but what was most interesting was the President portrayed a Middle East, in particular, that has little relation to the reality today and the ongoing tragedies, deaths, and sacrifice because of a failure of American leadership.

In interesting polling data today, a Pew Research poll indicates:

More Now See Failure than Success in Iraq, Afghanistan

Little Partisan Gap in Views of Whether U.S. Has Reached Goals.

It continues:

After more than a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the public does not think the United States has achieved its goals in either country. About half of Americans (52%) say the U.S. has mostly failed to achieve its goals in Afghanistan while 38% say it has mostly succeeded.

Opinions about the U.S. war in Iraq are virtually the same; 52 percent say the United States has mostly failed in reaching its goals there while 38 percent say it has mostly succeeded.

Continuing:

In both cases, evaluations of the wars have turned more negative in recent years. In November 2011, as the U.S. was completing its military withdrawal from Iraq, a majority (56%) thought the U.S. had achieved its goals there.

So the American people, despite the rhetoric from the administration—some of it incredibly bizarre—have figured out that after many years of sacrifice, expenditure of American blood and treasure, we are looking at and staring failure in the face.

I will quote from the President's speech the night before last.

On Iraq, the President said:

When I took office, nearly 180,000 troops were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, all our troops are out of Iraq.

Yes, that is a correct statement. But what the President didn't go on to say was that Iraq is now collapsing under the weight of sectarian violence that now has exceeded that of 2008, one of the most dangerous years of the war. What the President didn't say was that there is sectarian violence, Sunni and Shia, initiated largely by President

Maliki, which is causing attacks throughout Iraq—bomb detonations, IEDs, attacks on various institutions. President Maliki has driven his own vice president out of the country. The list goes on and on.

I say to my colleagues, there is no greater example of our failure in Iraq than Fallujah today. In the second battle of Fallujah, in 2007, the United States of America lost 96 marines and soldiers killed, over 600 wounded. Today, vehicles are driving through the streets of Fallujah flying Al-Qaeda flags. Al-Qaeda is now in charge in Fallujah.

I wonder what we tell families of those brave soldiers and marines who were killed and wounded in the first and second battle of Fallujah. Because in the words of General Petraeus, who was the architect of the surge—which most of my colleagues, including the President of the United States, said would fail, when actually there were many of us who knew that it would and did succeed: We won the war but lost the peace.

We lost the peace because the United States of America did not leave a residual force behind, thereby allowing the situation to deteriorate to where it is today with Al-Qaeda now in charge of the city of Fallujah, Ramadi—the Syria-Iraq border now being the headquarters and staging areas of Al-Qaeda in both Syria and Iraq. Their black flags now fly over cities where brave Americans, marines and soldiers, sacrificed their lives and their well-being.

Gen. James Conway, who commanded the marines in the first battle of Fallujah in April 2004, commenting on failures of the administration's policies in Iraq stated: "In some ways, the al-Qaeda grand strategy is vindicated." He deplored U.S. policies, appeared weak and confused in the wake of how hard we fought to get those cities back in the first place.

What did the President of the United States say? Did he mention Fallujah? Of course not.

He said:

When I took office, nearly 180,000 troops were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, all our troops are out of Iraq.

Yes, the troops are out of Iraq and the place is going to hell in a hand basket.

Don't think that these people, Al-Qaeda and Al Nusra, are not intent on pursuing their goals of radical Islam right to the United States of America. This should concern every one of my colleagues and every American citizen.

Yesterday there was a hearing in the Senate Intelligence Committee:

Al Qaida faction in Syria contemplating U.S. attack, intelligence officials warn.

Senate hears Nusra Front has "aspirations for attacks on the homeland" amid concern over civil war's terrorism implications.

Intelligence officials have claimed that a faction linked to al-Qaida in Syria has a desire to launch a domestic attack on the US, an assertion that underscored the growing importance of the Syrian civil war to global terrorism.

The Nusra Front, one of the jihadist factions in Syria, that aligns itself with al-Qaida, "does have aspirations for attack on the homeland," James Clapper, the US director of national intelligence, told the Senate Intelligence Committee on Wednesday, yesterday.

We know that with Al Nusra, Al-Qaeda, and other radical Islamist organizations, which, by the way, are attracting young men from all over the world, including Europe, is now one that is contemplating attacks on the United States of America.

I want to again mention General Conway, who commanded the marines during the first battle of Fallujah in 2004.

At the Heritage Foundation he said:

"We fought and died taking those cities," Conway said Wednesday at the Heritage Foundation. Conway became the Marine Corps commandant before retiring as a four-star general.

A blunt-talking general who rarely seeks the spotlight, Conway described his reaction to recent events in stark terms during his brief remarks.

It causes Iraqi and U.S. policies to look a little weak and confused in the wake of how hard we fought to get those cities back in the first place.

Continuing:

"In some ways, the al-Qaeda grand strategy is vindicated," Conway said, referring to the organization's desire to wait out American forces.

Why did they wait out American forces? They waited out American forces because as soon as President Obama took office he announced we were leaving. He didn't announce a strategy for success. He didn't say we have to reach certain goals before we leave. He told everybody we were leaving.

It is very clear, when we look at electoral history, that his vote against the resolution concerning military action in Iraq was one of the factors that led him to the Presidency. But for him to stand before the American people and say:

When I took office, nearly 180,000 Americans were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, all our troops are out of Iraq.

This is, at best, a very incomplete depiction of what has happened since all of those troops are out of Iraq.

Finally, General Conway said:

Those who lost people, those wounded, I think, are now stripped of a coping mechanism, Conway said. "If you have a young Marine or soldier sitting with his legs missing, he could at least previously say, 'Well what we did was the right thing. Iraq is better for it, and we won.'" I'm not sure that same individual sitting in that chair is thinking those things these days. That's truly sad.

I have talked to and heard from so many of these brave young Americans who feel exactly as General Conway described. They don't know and they don't understand after the enormous sacrifices that they made that somehow now black Al-Qaeda flags are flying over Fallujah.

On Afghanistan, the President said:

More than 60,000 of our troops have already come home from Afghanistan. With Afghan

forces now in the lead for their own security, our troops have moved to a support role. . . .

After 2014, we will support a unified Afghanistan as it takes responsibility for its own future. If the Afghan government signs a security agreement that we have negotiated, a small force of Americans could remain in Afghanistan with NATO allies to carry out two narrow missions: training and assisting Afghan forces, and counterterrorism operations to pursue any remnants of Al-Qaeda. For while our relationship with Afghanistan will change, one thing will not: our resolve that terrorists do not launch attacks against our country.

On the one hand, the President said there would be two narrow missions and yet our goal is still that terrorists don't launch attacks against our country. Again, he failed to put forward a true proposal for our strategy in Afghanistan and once again avoided offering any specifics on troop numbers. Why did we not leave a troop presence behind in Iraq? Because they would never give a troop number. Anybody who tells you the problem was not getting it through the Iraqi Parliament is not telling you the truth.

Senator GRAHAM, Senator Lieberman, and I were in Erbil when President Barzani said: I will go to Baghdad. When we met with Allawi, he said: I will sit with Maliki. We went to Maliki and Maliki said: I will agree to have a force of troops in my country. How many? We could not give him an answer nor would the administration give him an answer.

In the words and testimony of our Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the number cascaded down to 3,500, and that would have been a force that spent its time defending itself. Therefore, we did not leave a troop force behind in Iraq, and I have just described the consequences.

The same thing is happening in Afghanistan. The President will not say the force level he wants left behind in Afghanistan. Why is it he will not?

I want to point out that President Karzai of Afghanistan is a paranoid individual, and he has been incredibly unhelpful. It has been terribly disappointing to me—and I have known him for 14 years—that he is behaving as he is. But President Karzai's paranoia is somewhat understandable when he does not know whether the United States will remain, he doesn't know whether he can count on the United States, and he knows he has to stay in the neighborhood and accommodate for the likelihood now that the United States leaves completely. So his paranoia, to some degree, is much more understandable.

On our last trip to Afghanistan in early January, we saw firsthand the progress that has been made by American and Afghan forces, and such progress is a true testament to the positive impact our troops have had and the long-term benefits of our partnership with the Afghan people. The Afghan people, though, and military will need our continued support. If we pull out, if we see the Iraq movie again,

we will see the same thing happen in Afghanistan that is now happening in Iraq, and it doesn't take a lot of smarts to know that.

So now we turn to Syria. In Syria "we will support the opposition that rejects the agenda of terrorist networks." What does that mean?

Despite promise after promise, the administration has refused to provide aid to the moderate opposition forces in Syria who are committed. It was 2 years ago when the President of the United States said: It is not a matter of whether Bashar al-Assad will leave office, it is a matter of when. It was over 2 years ago, at the Senate Armed Services Committee, when Secretary of Defense Panetta and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in answer to my question: Sir, it is inevitable, it is inevitable that Bashar al-Assad will leave office.

Does anybody believe that now?

Our failure to help the Free Syrian Army over time was negated and overwhelmed by the presence of 5,000 Hezbollah sent in by the Iranians, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, plane-load after plane-load of weapons that now land at the Damascus Airport from Russia, while they are loaded onto Russian-built helicopters, and barrel bombs, which are explosives packed with all kinds of nuts and bolts and other metals, are dropped out of those helicopters on men, women, and children.

But not to worry—not to worry—because the chemical weapons are leaving, apparently, according to the President, because he said: American diplomacy, backed by the threat of force, is why Syria's chemical weapons are being eliminated, and we will continue to work with the international community to usher in the future the Syrian people deserve, a future free of a dictator, terror, and fear.

The chemical weapons he is hailing as a success—how much has been accomplished? The Syrian Government has delivered less than 5 percent of its deadliest chemical weapons agents to international authorities so far. This is a quote from an L.A. Times story:

Syria unlikely to meet deadline on its deadliest chemical agents. President Bashar Assad's government has delivered less than 5 percent of its deadliest chemical weapons agents. The deadline is next week.

So even this claim about chemical weapons being removed does not bear scrutiny. But far, far, far more important—far more important, I say—is that if we got rid of the chemical weapons Bashar al-Assad had, that would not change the equation on the ground. I am sure a Syrian mother cannot differentiate very well if her child is killed by a chemical weapon, a barrel bomb or is starved to death, as 120,000 men, women, and children have met that fate.

It is unbelievable. Now we are watching a charade take place in Geneva, and that of course has turned into a farce. Anybody who believes that

Bashar al-Assad is going to willingly leave office, when he is winning the battle on the ground, obviously has no idea of the nature of Bashar Assad.

Again, the slaughter goes on, and one of the huge aspects of this happens to be the fact that it is no longer a civil war. I would remind my colleagues this conflict began because in homes there were some children who wrote some anti-Assad graffiti on the wall. They were rounded up by Assad's police and were tortured and beaten, and that began an Arab spring in Syria. That spread throughout the country and now has spread throughout the region.

As I just said, the Iraq-Syria border is now Al Qaeda. It is now controlled by them. The Iranians are all in, with 5,000 Hezbollah; Lebanon is destabilized; Jordan is overwhelmed by refugees; Turkey is even under strain; 100,000-some refugees are even in Kurdistan. It has turned into a regional conflict and one which, sooner or later, will finally erupt into a major conflict which is going to affect the United States of America.

The President of the United States may want to leave the Middle East alone, but I can assure my colleagues the Middle East will not leave America alone. Look at the statement made just today by our Director of National Intelligence who said that al-Nusra, an affiliate of Al Qaeda, is planning attacks on the United States of America.

The President said: Finally, let's remember that our leadership is defined not just by our defense against threats but by the enormous opportunities to do good and promote understandings around the globe, and no one is better positioned to take advantage of those opportunities than America.

I couldn't agree more. But when the United States is viewed by the world, particularly the Middle East, as weak, withdrawing, no longer involved or trying to disengage, then I am not sure we can have the effects the President outlined in his State of the Union speech.

I think it is very clear that a seminal moment, as far as the entire Middle East is concerned, was when the President of the United States said that because Bashar Assad had crossed the red line in the use of chemical weapons—there was indisputable evidence that 1,400 men, women, and children had been killed in chemical weapons attacks—we were going to have to enact strikes against Bashar Assad in Syria. A few days later, our Secretary of State, in one of the more incredible statements I have ever heard—said: Yeah, but the strike will be "unbelievably small." I am not making that up. He said the strike would be "unbelievably small."

That must have really frightened the Syrians when they heard that any military strikes would be "unbelievably small."

The President of the United States then, without informing our allies—specifically the Saudis—according to published reports, took a 45-minute

walk with his Chief of Staff and then decided he would go to the Congress of the United States for permission or for ratification of any attack he might make, and, obviously, that wasn't going to happen.

I say to my colleagues, I travel a lot in the Middle East. I can tell you—and I would even name names but not on the record—that at that moment our allies lost confidence, they lost belief in the United States. We are now watching countries in the region openly stating—for example, the Saudi Arabians refusing a seat on the National Security Council of the United Nations—and this is published everywhere—they no longer believe in the United States of America.

By the way, one of the other aspects of this, and there are many, is a Washington Post story of this morning:

Europeans are flocking to the war in Syria. What happens when they come home?

The story is about a couple of people who went from England.

The distress among security officials is pervasive in European capitals and in Washington. U.S. Intelligence Chief James R. Clapper, Jr. told a congressional panel Wednesday that the Syrian war had attracted about 7,000 foreign fighters from as many as 50 nations and that at least one of the main jihadist groups in Syria aspires to carry out an attack in the United States. But Europe is a far closer and more accessible target. The International Center for the Study of Radicalization estimated last month that nearly 2,000 Western Europeans had traveled to Syria to fight and that the number was rising fast.

Continuing to quote from the article:

French officials say 700 came from France. French Interior Minister Manuel Valls asserted this month that returning fighters represent "the biggest threat the country faces in the coming years." The anxiety has been especially acute in Britain, where memories are still fresh of the July 2005 transit bombings. These attacks, which claimed 52 lives, were carried out by home-grown radicals, at least two of whom had received training in Pakistan. "The penny hasn't dropped. But Syria is a game-changer," Richard Walton, who leads counterterrorism efforts at Scotland Yard, told the Evening Standard newspaper. "We are seeing it every day. You have hundreds of people going to Syria, and if they don't get killed they get radicalized."

So we are in a situation of failed leadership over the last 5 years and the chickens, unfortunately, are beginning to come home to roost. When the President of the United States, in his address to the Nation, describes things in the Middle East as he did, I think it is very, very, very unfortunate because that does not comport with the actual facts on the ground.

I say to my colleagues, the American people no longer believe our mission in Iraq and Afghanistan was the right thing to do. I can tell my constituents that in 2008 things were very different. The surge had worked. We were gradually withdrawing from Syria. We had the Taliban in Afghanistan largely under control. In Syria, Bashar Assad was losing. Now the terrain throughout the Middle East is dramatically different.

As much as I regret to say, it is my obligation to tell my constituents my view; that is, we have very, very difficult times ahead. I do not like to predict that bad things are going to happen, but right now I don't see how they can be avoided.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, the number one priority for any Senator from North Dakota is the passage of a 5-year farm bill.

When I was campaigning across North Dakota, I reminded my constituents that in spite of this wonderful energy renaissance we have going on in North Dakota, over 90 percent of all the land in my State is engaged in production agriculture.

It makes this farm bill so critically important to the economy not only of my State but the economy of this country. Sixteen million jobs depend in this country on the passage of a farm bill which provides producers with risk management opportunities that make their farm work sustainable and make their continuation in production agriculture economically possible.

So it is a good week for North Dakotans. Today we passed the flood insurance bill which will prohibit draconian and very dramatic increases in flood insurance prices from affecting my State. But also we are on the cusp and terribly close to doing something we have waited so long to do, and that is to pass a 5-year farm bill.

I will talk in general about some of the things this farm bill does, but I wish to focus my attention on two areas not a lot of people have come to the floor to talk about, and those are the provisions for beginning farmers and ranchers and the importance of the livestock provisions in the farm bill.

The farm bill achieves the goals that put our agricultural system in a strong position to continue this country's role as a world leader in production agriculture. This is achieved through an effective farm program for growers, livestock disaster coverage for ranchers and livestock producers, enhanced crop insurance offerings, expanded agricultural research, and increased export promotion for agricultural products.

We have been void in our balance of trade by the inclusion of agricultural products and by what we do on the farm that has made a difference to that trade deficit: critical investments in biofuels which help build a stronger, more vibrant, and more resilient energy policy in our State; renewal of a sugar program to prevent excess imports of unfairly subsidized imported and foreign sugar; and targeted conservation assistance to tackle unique challenges, particularly in my State and the Red River Valley and in Devil's Lake. But I will tell a little story.

For years I have been going to farm producer meetings. During my time as a State official in North Dakota, I spent a lot of time at the Farm Bureau,

a lot of time at the Farmers Union, with corn growers and soybean growers, and getting to know and understand agricultural work on tax and regulatory issues. I always felt as if I was the youngest person in the room that whole while, and I was in my 30s and 40s. I would walk into a room and feel young. That has really been true.

I had a really wonderful experience when I was back home this last trip. I went to something called Precision Agriculture, which is a special conference the Farmers Union hosts for North Dakota's NDSU Extension, where they look at using different kinds of new technologies, whether they are application technologies to be more efficient in how we use fertilizers and seeds or whether it is finding an app that gives us more information for marketing. You name it. The Precision Agriculture conference has gotten bigger and bigger.

But why I point that out and talk about it is that as I stood at the podium and took one look, I said: I want everybody under the age of 45 to stand up. Well over half of my audience stood up. That has never before happened in the 30 years I have been involved in public policy in North Dakota.

Young farmers are coming back to the farm. Young farmers are engaging at levels with technological developments and techniques that heretofore were not available and really weren't trusted maybe by an older generation.

So now we have this new generation of producers who are going to do one of the most important things that we do in this country, which is to feed our people and literally to feed the world. They are willing to do that. They are willing to risk and make incredible investments on the farm, whether it is land prices or equipment prices or whether it is betting the entire farm that you are not going to get hauled out. This farm bill is critical, first and foremost, to making sure that risk is mitigated by a crop insurance program which works for those young farmers.

I will outline just very briefly what those beginning farmer and beginning rancher programs are in this farm bill.

While this is changing, according to the Department of Agriculture's most recent census, the average age of American farmers is 57 years old; a quarter of American farmers are over the age of 65. Now, in North Dakota that dynamic is changing, as I have just outlined. But the 2014 farm bill makes critical investments to ensure that this next generation of farmers has an opportunity to enter the field by overcoming the high capital constraints and low production histories that make those early years the most difficult.

The program continues and funds the beginning farmer and rancher development program which develops and offers education, training, outreach, and mentoring programs to ensure the success of the next generation of farmers. The bill expands eligibility to include

military veterans who wish to begin a career in agriculture.

The 2008 farm bill had \$75 million for this program with 5 years mandatory. The 2014 bill ups that amount to \$100 million, recognizing the need that we have to create that next generation of producers.

The 2014 farm bill prioritizes beginning farmers across USDA programs. The Department of Agriculture is required to prioritize beginning farmers to ensure they have access to USDA programs. The bill continues to set aside loan funds for both the beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers who struggle to find credit someplace else.

There are also 5-percent set-asides in the environmental quality incentive program and the conservation stewardship program to make sure that beginning farmers and ranchers have fair and equitable access to conservation programs.

This new farm bill increases access to capital for new farmers and ranchers. The bill makes significant strides in increasing lending to beginning farmers by expanding eligibility, removing term limits on guaranteed lending, and strengthening microloan programs that serve those beginning farmers.

This farm bill encourages older farmers to help beginning farmers through conservation. The bill reauthorizes the Conservation Reserve Program Transition Incentive Program, which gives 2 extra years of CRP to retiring farmers who transition their expiring CRP lands to beginning farmers. This program has seen great success with retiring farmers who want to help the next generation get started.

This new farm bill helps beginning farmers buy land. The bill reauthorized the contract land sales program, which guarantees loan payments to retiring farmers who sell their cropland to beginning farmers. It also continues the down payment loan program which allows young farmers without much money to start investments and down payments on a farm or a ranch. The borrower makes a cash down payment of at least 5 percent of the total cost, and the government provides a low-interest loan for 45 percent of the payment.

This new farm bill invests in value-added strategies that are especially important to these new farmers, value-added grants encouraging independent producers to process raw products into marketable goods, adding value and increasing farm income. Beginning farmers will continue to be given a high priority in this program.

It helps beginning farmers plan in the early years. The bill continues the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Individual Development Accounts, which are designed to help new farmers finance their agricultural pursuits.

So this is for the next generation who looks and says: Is there opportunity in being a farmer? Can farmers not only work there, but can they own

the land and continue our rich and strong tradition of family farming?

I think the answer is yes. This is a farm program that offers them that opportunity that says: Yes, the United States and its people are willing to invest in your future.

Finally, I wish to talk about the importance of the livestock provisions. Livestock production is hugely important to North Dakota. Are we the largest livestock producer in the United States of America? That would not be true. But for my ranchers out west, this is a critically important program. This is a program which says to the ranchers: We recognize that not everybody who is engaged in production agriculture is engaged in producing crops or specialty crops. Those who herd cattle and work cattle and work as hard as any group of people I know deserve some attention in this farm bill.

If there ever was an example of where we needed to do something more for our beginning ranchers, the early snow storm of 2013 is it, where people literally lost their entire herd. For those who maybe don't have a lot of expertise, understand this: One cow is not interchangeable. Many of these families over the years, through genetics and through selective breeding, have in fact built the herd—built a herd unique to their ranch—and they lost it all.

When they turned to us and said: What is there to help us? We had to say: Nothing.

If you get hailed out and have crop insurance, there is help. If you have a major disaster and can't plant, there is help.

But what is there for us? We had to say “nothing,” because we hadn't done a farm bill on a timely basis, and there was no help for those farmers.

This farm bill is retroactive. It is going to help those farmers who not only experience loss in the future but who have experienced loss since October of 2011. We are on our way to fulfilling the commitment that all of us made who came to the floor in October and talked about that terrible storm.

The 2014 farm bill includes exactly the type of pro-rancher policies I wanted Washington to produce. Not only does the bill include important livestock disaster programs; the bill also continues the widely popular and beneficial program called country of origin labeling—or COOL—policy which for years has been fought for by ranching families in North Dakota.

Additionally, the farm bill allows USDA in future years to move forward with livestock competition rules to provide transparent pricing for cow-calf operators in my State and elsewhere.

Finally, the farm bill provides targeted conservation and research programs for the support of cattle, pork, and poultry industries so they can better assess the challenges facing livestock production.

I get a lot of questions even in my State. Why should anyone support the

farm program? Aren't things pretty good out there on the farm? I will say, over 4 million acres in North Dakota alone could not be planted this last crop season because of high water. That means the difference between a family farmer staying in business and not staying in business. But importantly, for all of America, this means we have a crop production system which feeds our country.

I tell people, let's think about things from the standpoint of value-added. What does that mean? New wealth doesn't come when you go to the retail store and buy a shirt or a new coat. That is not new wealth. We are just taking money which has been generated someplace else and circulating it in the economy. New wealth is created particularly in extractive industries such as oil and gas, coal mining, and it is created in agriculture. It is the quintessential new wealth creator. From the hard work of those producers in America grows an entire economy that fuels the opportunity for 16 million jobs.

In my State of North Dakota, I was recently talking to a plant worker who works at the KSHI plant who explained to someone that his top priority for his workers was the passage of a farm bill. They said: Why would you care about the passage of a farm bill?

He said: Don't you get it? If the farmers aren't doing well, we aren't producing tractors. We are not producing what we need to produce.

I want everyone to understand that this is not a farm bill just for States such as North Dakota and Minnesota. This is a farm bill for the entire world—to feed the entire world. It is also a farm bill that provides new wealth creation that encourages the growth of 16 million jobs.

I will close with one final thought. We talk about food, fiber, and fuel—the three things we talk about when we talk about agricultural products. But we know that in the applied research we see in those great land-grant colleges—and our State has one of the best. It is called NDSU. They have the best football team in the history of forever. But let me tell you, it is also a great extension program and great agricultural research center.

They are doing amazing work at NDSU in polymer research. They are looking at biodegradable coatings and paints. We know that advanced manufacturing is the next step we are going to make in agriculture, and we are going to do everything we can to make sure that those products are sustainable and that those products are safe to use for our people and for our animals.

I encourage all of my colleagues to support this farm program so we can make sure we keep 16 million people working and that we have that next generation of beginning farmers and beginning ranchers who are producing food for our country and food for the world.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I thank the Chair and thank Senator KLOBUCHAR for allowing me to go ahead of her. I ask to be notified after 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

YUCCA MOUNTAIN

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I wish to talk about recent rulings in the Yucca Mountain repository litigation. I am ranking member of the Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on the Clean Air and Nuclear Safety. This is a matter I have followed closely. Our committee had a hearing this morning with the entire Nuclear Regulatory Commission and its new Chairman. These decisions are not simply political decisions, of course, they are legal decisions that adjudicated certain legal disputes that have been simmering for a number of years. The court's judgments were founded on law, not politics or nuclear policy. It adjudicated certain contested legal matters. From my perspective, it was an affirmation of plain law against plain defiance of law, and the court made that clear.

Last August the DC Circuit—in the case of *in re: Aiken County*—rendered a decision that provided a clear legal victory to proponents of nuclear energy in America. More important, it was a victory for the rule of law and the U.S. taxpayer and a victory for the rightful power of Congress to adjudicate and legislate on energy policy. The judgment also rendered a resounding defeat for the policies advocated by the current administration, the majority leader of the Senate, and other politicians who have worked for years to thwart the law by refusing or blocking actions to implement the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, which is the law of the land.

More recently, in November of 2013, the DC Circuit issued another ruling in the case of the *National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners v. United States Department of Energy*. These Commissioners around the United States sued the Department of Energy. These Commissioners represent our States. That court found that the current administration—the Obama administration—has been ignoring the Nuclear Waste Policy Act.

The DC Circuit ordered the Energy Department to stop charging U.S. ratepayers \$750 million a year in nuclear waste fees until the Federal Government complies with the Nuclear Waste Policy Act.

As a result, on January 3, just a few weeks ago, the Secretary of Energy was forced to formally submit a proposal to Congress to reduce the nuclear waste fee to zero—to end the fee—while at the same time asking the DC Circuit to reconsider the ruling it has rendered, which I don't think it will.

Taken together, these two rulings vindicate the concerns that many of us have raised since 2009 about the lawless

actions of this administration in failing to deal with our Nation's nuclear waste in the manner required by law.

I hear from people all the time who wonder how in the world the President doesn't comply with the law. He amends the health care act and does other things that most Americans are just taken aback by. They can't imagine how he is not bound by law like everyone else, and, of course, he is. Indeed, he takes an oath to ensure that the laws of the United States are faithfully carried out.

I am currently serving as the Ranking member of the Senate Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Safety, which has oversight jurisdiction with respect to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and I have been looking closely at this matter. The Administration's lawless actions regarding nuclear energy, supported by the Senate Majority Leader, are deeply disturbing and contrary to a sound national energy policy. No one Senator, no matter how prominent, can overrule established law.

The background: Over 30 years ago Congress passed the Nuclear Waste Policy Act to require the Federal Government to accept nuclear waste from commercial nuclear reactors around the country with the objective of safely storing it in a single, permanent, geologic repository that is safe and secure.

A recent report entitled "Yucca Mountain: A Post-Mortem" in *The New Atlantis* provides some important statistics. It is estimated that, today, the U.S. has accumulated over 65,000 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel, which is enough waste to "cover one football field to a depth of approximately 20 feet." That number is expected to more than double by 2055. This nuclear waste is currently stored at 75 sites spread across 33 states. The 8 states with the most spent nuclear fuel are Illinois, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, New York, Alabama, California, Florida and South Carolina.

This report also recognizes that "there is broad consensus among scientists from around the world" that geologic disposal is "the best available option for permanent disposal of spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste . . ." This is not a surprising conclusion, as Congress determined decades ago that it is in the national interest to safely and securely dispose of nuclear waste deep underground far from populated areas. It is difficult to imagine a better location for such a repository than Yucca Mountain, NV, the remote site that has been selected by Congress.

Congress also created the Nuclear Waste Fund to collect the fees that were extracted from the nuclear power electric-generating companies. Money is taken from them, which they take from the ratepayers, and that money was to be used to cover the cost of this program. So far the Federal Government has collected \$25 billion for this fund at a rate of about \$750 million a year.

In 1987, the Congress passed—and President Reagan signed—a law that amended the Nuclear Waste Policy Act by officially designating Yucca Mountain, NV, as the Nation's geologic repository for spent nuclear fuel.

In July of 2002, Congress overrode Nevada's objections. Their representatives didn't like it, although I would note the area of Nevada where this facility is to be in place strongly supports it and they opposed Nevada leaders who opposed building it.

Congress overrode the objections and passed a joint resolution that said:

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that there hereby is approved the site at Yucca Mountain, Nevada, for a repository. . . .

An extensive scientific evaluation process ensued, culminating in the Energy Department determination, in an Environmental Impact Statement, that Yucca Mountain is an appropriate site for the safe, long-term geological storage of nuclear waste. Yucca Mountain is perhaps, according to a 2006 report by the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, "the most studied real estate on the planet."

In 2008, the U.S. Energy Department submitted to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission an 8,600-page application for authorization to construct the repository. It discussed every possible complaint and concern that could be raised, analyzing all the issues.

Section 114 of the act states that once the application is received by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, it "shall issue a final decision approving or disapproving the issuance of a construction authorization not later than the expiration of 3 years after the date of the submission of such application. . . ." That was in 2008, and they have not rendered a decision since.

This means the NRC is under a clear legal duty—as set out in statute, passed by Congress, signed by the President—to promptly complete the licensing process for Yucca.

Regrettably, in 2009, the Obama administration and its allies orchestrated a complex scheme to ignore the law, to control the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and shut down the Yucca mountain process.

How was this done? Here is how the Federal circuit court judge—Judge Raymond Randolph—described the administration's scheme. This is dramatic and crystal clear language. It blows the whistle on one of the most significant obstructions of law that I have seen during my time in Washington.

This is what the judge ruled:

Former (NRC) Chairman Gregory Jaczko orchestrated a systematic campaign of non-compliance. Jaczko unilaterally ordered commission staff to terminate the [Yucca] review process in October 2010; instructed staff to remove key findings from reports evaluating the Yucca Mountain site; and ignored the will of his fellow commissioners.

That is a dramatic indictment of Mr. Jaczko's leadership. I would note par-

enthetically that Mr. Jaczko was the choice of Majority Leader REID. He worked on Senator REID's staff, and he insisted that Mr. Jaczko be made the Chairman of the Commission.

Here is how the Board of County Commissioners of Nye County, Nevada—where Yucca Mountain is located and which strongly supports completion of the repository—explained it. They wrote in a recent letter that the Yucca repository has been "hijacked by the politics of a single powerful senator and what some view as complicity by the NRC Chairman [Mr. Jaczko]."

Beginning in 2009, now former Chairman Jaczko was able to effectively block any further progress on Yucca Mountain; that is, until the DC Circuit finally ruled in August of last year that those actions were in clear violation of the law, which was an important victory for the rule of law and for the power of Congress.

In its ruling, the DC Circuit determined that "the [NRC] has continued to violate the law governing the Yucca Mountain licensing process."

The court then highlighted that the NRC had gone well beyond missing the statutory deadline for completing its review of the licensing application. Recognizing that "Congress has not altered the legal landscape"; that is, Congress has not amended the Nuclear Waste Policy Act; the court explained that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is "simply flouting the law."

The court also observed that, under Article II of the Constitution, "the President must follow statutory mandates so long as there is appropriated money available and the President has no constitutional objection to the statute . . ." The court stated that "the President may not decline to follow a statutory mandate or prohibition because of policy objections . . ." That is, "absent a lack of funds or a claim of unconstitutionality that has not been rejected by final Court order, the Executive [and its agencies] must abide by statutory mandates and prohibitions."

The court further explained: "It is no overstatement to say that our constitutional system of separation of powers would be significantly altered if we were to allow executive and independent agencies to disregard federal law in the manner asserted in this case by the NRC." On this basis, the court granted the request of the plaintiffs in the case for a "writ of mandamus against the NRC." This is a writ that is rarely issued that orders a governmental body to comply with the law. It held that the NRC "must promptly continue with the legally mandated licensing process." This was an important victory for the American constitutional order.

Completing Yucca has big implications for the Federal budget. As the ranking member of the Budget Committee, I believe we need to watch every dime we raise and spend. We have already spent, amazingly, \$15 billion—

according to the Government Accountability Office—evaluating Yucca and other sites and doing work at the site.

We have already paid \$2 billion as of January 2012 for claims resulting from the Government's failure to deal with the waste issue; in other words, people have sued and made claims against the government for not fulfilling its obligation to build this site, and we have already paid out \$2 billion. It is a shame people can't be held individually responsible for obstructing the law and causing the Federal taxpayers to pay out \$2 billion.

According to the Congressional Research Service, the Federal Government's total liability for breach of contract claims from the failure to resolve the waste issue could reach \$50 billion. The government agreed and set up a method to receive this waste. The electric utility companies that generate nuclear power are now being forced—for decades—to keep the waste onsite at great expense, even though they paid billions of dollars into the fund to make sure it is taken care of at a single site.

With this important court victory, we may hope and expect that the Nation's nuclear waste program can be put back on track, and it is hurting right now. The costs are real, and they fall on virtually all Americans.

On October 28, the DC Circuit denied the NRC's petition for rehearing en banc. So the writ of mandamus stands. And, on November 19, 2013, the DC Circuit rendered another important decision in this arena. The court found the Energy Department in non-compliance with the Nuclear Waste Policy Act and ordered the Secretary of Energy to "submit to Congress a proposal to change the [nuclear waste] fee to zero until such a time as either the secretary chooses to comply with the [Nuclear Waste Policy Act] as it is currently written, or until Congress enacts an alternative waste management fee."

In response, on January 3, 2014, the Energy Secretary submitted a proposal to Congress to zero-out the nuclear waste fee. Pursuant to the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, 42 U.S.C. Section 10222(a)(4), this proposal "shall be effective after a period of 90 days of continuous session have elapsed following the receipt of such transmittal . . ."

Now an important question is, how will the NRC respond? Our nation derives almost 20 percent of the electricity needed to drive the economy through nuclear power, which is a clean, safe, and affordable source of energy. The failure of this Administration to deal with the issue of nuclear waste disposal over the last 5 years has posed a serious threat to the future viability of nuclear power. As a recent report by the Heritage Foundation, entitled "Obama Administration: No Confidence in Nuclear Energy," explains:

President Obama's decision to abandon plans for removing the waste to the Yucca Mountain repository in Nevada creates an

uncertainty that could be a barrier to the expansion of nuclear power.

So, this issue is critical to the future of nuclear power in America. We need to get this waste repository issue settled, and I believe the NRC should expeditiously proceed with the Yucca license proceeding in an independent manner worthy of the important task they have been assigned. I am hopeful that if we do so, we may have turned a final corner.

I received a letter dated October 23rd from the current NRC Chairman, Dr. Allison Macfarlane, providing a copy of the NRC's first monthly status report concerning compliance with the DC Circuit ruling and explaining that the NRC "will deliberate and determine the various activities that might compose the agency's response to the court's decision." A day later, on October 24th, I was joined by Senate EPW ranking member DAVID VITTER and all Republican subcommittee members in sending a letter to Dr. Macfarlane, urging the NRC to "comply expeditiously" with the DC Circuit's decision and explaining that "the next step in this legally mandated licensing process is for the NRC to complete the [Safety Evaluation Reports]" for the Yucca site.

On November 18, 2013, the NRC approved an order directing the NRC staff to implement the DC Circuit ruling by completing the Safety Evaluation Reports for Yucca Mountain. This is an important and crucial step in the process. I have, since, received other NRC reports dated December 18, 2013, and January 24, 2014, describing activities related to Yucca Mountain. The NRC has asked the Energy Department to prepare the supplemental environmental documents that are needed to move forward with the licensing process. It is my expectation that the Secretary of Energy will act promptly to provide the necessary information and support and to avoid the kinds of political schemes and unlawful acts that have previously derailed the Yucca process.

According to the NRC, the Energy Department has more than \$15 million in funds that could be used to support Yucca-related efforts, and an additional \$18 million that could potentially become available for these purposes. The most recent report from the NRC explains that "completion of the [Yucca Mountain safety report] is scheduled to take approximately 12 months, ending in January 2015," and that available funds are sufficient to complete this task.

The NRC Chairman and other Commissioners must follow the law in this matter. During her confirmation process earlier this year, Dr. Macfarlane affirmed a strong commitment to the "independence" and "impartiality" of the NRC and pledged to defend those principles. For instance, in her responses to my questions during her confirmation process, she unequivocally agreed with me that the NRC "should not allow political meddling

from Congress or other parts of the executive branch to interfere with the NRC's independent decision-making processes." She committed to "zealously guard the independence of the NRC and oppose any efforts to undermine it."

During her confirmation, she also correctly recognized that the "responsibility for establishing a nuclear waste policy resides with Congress," and she acknowledged that the "NRC currently has approximately \$11.1 million in unobligated carryover funds (and \$2.5 million in obligated, unexpended carryover funds) appropriated from the Nuclear Waste Fund" and that these funds "could be used for a variety of activities related to the Yucca Mountain project, including the completion of the technical licensing review."

We will be watching this process closely. I know that the leadership in the House of Representatives will be watching as well. In a letter dated August 23, 2013, the House Energy & Commerce Committee Chairman, FRED UPTON, and Environment & Energy Subcommittee Chairman, JOHN SHIMKUS, wrote to the NRC, stating:

[I]t is our expectation that the NRC's first action to implement the Court's decision will be to diligently resume its review of the license application, complete the [Safety Report], and issue it publicly. Our country has invested 30 years and \$15 billion in determining whether Yucca Mountain would be a safe repository. The NRC is this nation's nuclear safety regulator and its reputation for independence and objectivity rests on its transparency in this matter. As such, NRC's objective, scientific findings regarding the safety of Yucca Mountain would provide the public an independent, authoritative assessment of this important project.

I agree with Chairman UPTON and Subcommittee Chairman SHIMKUS. In particular, the NRC should know that Congress will watch closely to make sure that costs associated with completing the safety report for Yucca Mountain are appropriate and in line with earlier estimates.

Importantly, the NRC should already have all documentation necessary for this process ready and available. In December 2011, I joined Senator MARK KIRK and eight other Senate colleagues in a letter to the NRC and Energy Department about Yucca Mountain. That letter—sent over 2 years ago—was out of a deep concern that we had that the Administration was purposefully jeopardizing the ability for future consideration of the Yucca Mountain application by failing to adequately preserve scientific information and other records. We explained that "preserving the historical records and all scientific documents relating to Yucca Mountain is important to the nation's long-term goal of achieving a permanent solution to our nation's accumulating nuclear waste."

In that letter, we also explained:

Yucca Mountain is one of the most extensive research and development investments this country has ever undertaken. More than

\$14 billion of taxpayer money and nearly 25 years of scientific research, data collection, geological characterization and evidence was collected to study the Yucca Mountain facility.

In March 2012, former NRC Chairman Gregory Jaczko responded to our letter, stating: “The NRC documents relating to the Yucca Mountain Program . . . will continue to be retained as permanent records . . .”

I will note that the members of the board are good people, and I think the new chairman, Dr. Macfarlane, is going to try to do a much better job. But it was unbelievable how the former Chairman was able to obstruct Federal law.

The NRC should be able to proceed promptly with completing the licensing process. But if they fail to do so, the NRC Chairman, or the entire Commission, could be held in contempt of court and appropriate sanctions could be issued by the court, and should be, if they fail, and that was discussed this morning at the hearing. The Commission says they are going to move forward. They say they don't have as much money as they would like to have. They haven't asked for more money. They have a duty to fix this problem and deal with it, and if they need more money, they should ask Congress for it.

After all of these years and the money spent, a contempt citation would be a colossal failure and a tremendous embarrassment, and it would be the result of a willful failure to follow the clear responsibility of law.

In conclusion, I believe the DC Circuit's recent rulings concerning the Nuclear Waste Policy Act have made an important contribution to the Rule of Law in the United States and to the future of nuclear power. In Congress, there is strong bipartisan support for completing the Yucca license review process. In 2012, the House voted overwhelmingly, 326–81, in favor of appropriating the funds necessary for the NRC to continue the Yucca licensing process. Then, in July of 2013, the House soundly defeated an amendment offered by a member from Nevada that would cut funding for the Yucca licensing process. That amendment failed by a vote of 335–81.

Last July, Representatives FRED UPTON (R-MI) and JOHN DINGELL (D-MI), chairman and chairman emeritus, respectively, of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, authored an editorial entitled “Decision on Yucca Mountain Overdue.” They wrote:

Congress passed the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 to establish a deliberate, collaborative and mandatory process to site, license, build and operate a national permanent nuclear waste repository. The act obliges the federal government to safely dispose of high-level nuclear defense waste and commercial spent fuel from power plants. Electricity consumers and taxpayers have paid approximately \$15 billion to determine if the Yucca Mountain site in Nevada would be a safe repository. The [NRC] owes them an answer.

I couldn't agree more. With the benefit of the DC Circuit rulings in August

and November of last year, which so clearly stated the Administration's duties under law, Congress must not accept any further delay in the Yucca Mountain license process.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

LUGER NOMINATION

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Madam President, I thank my colleague from Alabama for making his remarks a bit briefer, and I thank him as well for accompanying me to the State of the Union Address 2 nights ago.

I rise today to urge a vote in the U.S. Senate to confirm the nominee to be Minnesota's next U.S. attorney. I see my colleague and friend from Iowa here, Senator GRASSLEY, who has been working hard on his good nominee as well for Iowa, and we have been working on this together.

When we look at the extraordinary circumstances under which the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Minnesota has been operating, it will be clear why a vote on this nomination and getting this done is so important.

For 2½ years—883 days—Minnesota has not had a full-time U.S. attorney. During those years, from August 2011 to August 2013, Todd Jones was responsible for doing two jobs as the Minnesota U.S. attorney and as the Acting Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. I would note, as Senator GRASSLEY has pointed out, it has been a difficult time in the office. While they continue to do good work, in part because the U.S. attorney's office in Minnesota has great prosecutors, they did not have a full-time manager during this time, pending the approval of the ATF job and during the appointment time.

Over the summer, the Senate, as the Presiding Officer knows, confirmed Todd Jones as the Director of the ATF—the first permanent Director in 7 years—leaving the Minnesota U.S. attorney's position open. Senator FRANKEN and I, in consultation with getting a recommendation from a bipartisan U.S. Attorney Advisory Committee, which included the former Republican-appointed U.S. attorney under both the first George Bush and the second George Bush, who served on our advisory board, we recommended Andy Luger, a respected litigator and former assistant U.S. attorney, to fill the position. We recommended him 191 days ago.

It has now been about 6 months—183 days—since Director Jones left and we still do not have a permanent, full-time U.S. attorney. Minnesota needs a full-time U.S. attorney. It is a major jurisdiction. Andy Luger has the experience and know-how necessary to do this job well.

From his days fighting white-collar crime as an assistant U.S. attorney to his work with Minnesota law enforcement to help improve their gang-fighting strategy, Andy has earned the re-

spect of the legal and law enforcement communities. Throughout his career, he has proven to be a tireless advocate for the people of Minnesota.

As an assistant U.S. attorney, he successfully prosecuted organized crime, drug and white-collar cases. This included the prosecution of a \$150 million national real estate and investment fraud case, leading to the longest white-collar sentence in the United States at that time. In 2009, he was appointed by the Minnesota Commissioner of Public Safety to lead an investigation into the Metro Gang Strike Force and uncovered a series of problems with the unit. He recommended that the unit be disbanded and replaced by other law enforcement efforts and it was, in fact, abolished.

In fact, a Star Tribune editorial said that Andy's review of the strike force made “smart recommendations about The Twin Cities' next generation gang-fighting strategy” and that his report included “welcome measures to begin the long process of rebuilding the public's trust.”

Andy is well respected in the law enforcement community. I can tell my colleagues that after we made the recommendation to the President, I got nothing but positive words from police chiefs and others who are excited about him in this job. He is committed to building and maintaining strong working relationships and partnerships between Federal and local law enforcement.

In addition to his many years as a Federal prosecutor, Andy has had a distinguished career in private practice. He is currently a partner at the Greene Espel law firm where he is well regarded as a highly skilled trial lawyer focused on business litigation, representing businesses and white-collar defense. He has been selected as one of Minnesota's Top 100 “Super Lawyers” for the past 10 years and as one of the “Best Lawyers in America” for the past 4 years. He clearly has the experience, character, and drive to lead such a premier law enforcement agency as the Minnesota U.S. attorney's office.

The Minnesota U.S. attorney's office represents the United States with professionalism, high ethical standards, and an unwavering commitment to the safety of our community. These prosecutors work to protect public safety by focusing on the offenders who do the most harm to the community—terrorists, the “worst of the worst” violent criminals, drug traffickers, and major financial fraudsters. They also work closely with local law enforcement to ensure local and Federal resources are used efficiently and effectively.

I personally know this after having served as the chief prosecutor for Minnesota's largest county, Hennepin County, for 8 years, and I worked daily with our U.S. attorney. We would discuss which office would handle cases. During the Moussaoui investigation, as people recall, we got in Minnesota the hijacker who survived, the guy who

threatened to learn how to down a plane and was caught and imprisoned, and that came out of Minnesota immediately after 9/11. The office was very focused on the terrorism investigation and my office stepped in and took some major white-collar cases to help out. We have a tradition of working together throughout the years, and that is why this office is so important to me.

Example: The office won a conviction in a \$3.65 billion Ponzi scheme, the second biggest Ponzi scheme in U.S. history. It has an ongoing terrorism investigation that has led to charges against 18 people for aiding the terrorist organization Shabaad, 8 of whom have been convicted, some receiving sentences of up to 20 years in prison. If one can imagine this, they are conducting major terrorism investigations and prosecutions, and we need a full-time U.S. attorney to make decisions and to be in charge.

Other major accomplishments include Operation Highlife, which was a major drug trafficking investigation involving more than 100 local, State, and Federal law enforcement officers and resulted in 26 indictments, 25 guilty pleas, and sentences up to 200 months in prison.

Operation Brother's Keeper was a successful investigation and prosecution of a RICO case involving a regional 200-member gang, which took 22 dangerous criminals off the street.

Operation Malverde received national attention with the prosecution of 27 defendants associated with a Mexican drug cartel, including the apprehension of the cartel regional leader, and sentences as high as 20 years in prison.

The office also recently played a key role in shutting down a major synthetic drug seller in Duluth. This head shop was a huge problem. The perpetrator has been convicted and is awaiting sentencing. They literally found over \$700,000 in his bathroom hidden in small plastic bags. They went after this head shop. They prosecuted that guy. They won that case. They deserve a leader.

Andy Luger is the right person for this job. The Judiciary Committee agreed and reported out his nomination without objection on January 9. I appreciate the service of the Presiding Officer as well as Senator GRASSLEY, who is here, on our Judiciary Committee, and I appreciate the support for his nomination.

I also supported the nomination of the U.S. attorney from Iowa, and we know how important that job is as well.

This position of U.S. attorney was regarded by the Founders as so vital that they created it during the very first Congress; a position so crucial that it was born in the same law as the structure of the U.S. court; a position so necessary that President Zachary Taylor filled it within 2 days of Minnesota becoming a State.

In our case, for a variety of reasons—a variety of reasons—we have now gone

883 days without a full-time U.S. attorney. This is our moment. We need to move ahead on this nomination.

Again, I appreciate Senator GRASSLEY's help in moving these nominations forward. We have two U.S. attorneys, two Federal marshals. I can say that Andy is a dedicated public servant whose breadth of experience, strength of character, and commitment to justice make him a well-qualified candidate to serve as Minnesota's next U.S. attorney.

I don't think there are any objections to his nomination, but I urge my colleagues to support his confirmation and give this office the leader it deserves, as well as the district of Iowa.

Thank you very much, Madam President. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

THE FARM BILL

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I had a chance to listen to the Senator from Minnesota, and I come to speak on another subject, but I wish to assure her that we will get these two nominees and others across the finish line so the U.S. attorney for Minnesota can go to work, hopefully before we get many more days added to the 800 she has already talked about.

The farm bill process has been very long, very hard, and no doubt frustrating for all who have been involved. Some of us on the Senate agriculture committee have participated in two committee markups and two floor debates for this bill, and that is over a period of two Congresses. I voted for and supported the bill at every one of those junctures.

I believe our country needs a good farm policy, which means, of course, an adequate and yet limited safety net for farmers, because so much about farming is beyond the control of the farmers, and I am not talking just about natural disasters. Without a doubt, our farmers then face real, uncontrollable risks every year. The farm bill provides farmers, then, with a number of programs to mitigate risks.

Agriculture remains a changing industry. Unbelievable technological advancements are taking place right before our eyes. Farmers can now control irrigation equipment and monitor grain bins on the phone from the other side of the world. Agricultural technology is progressing so quickly. Five years from now, when we debate the next farm bill, autonomous tractors may well be doing a considerable amount of the field work in America.

Farm policy has also changed over time. Unfortunately, the majority of farm program benefits have started going to a concentrated number of farmers. The fact is 10 percent of the farmers—and those obviously would be the wealthy farmers—get 70 percent of the benefits from a farm bill. One reason for this is that the current farm policy offers farmers essentially unlimited subsidies if they hire the right lawyers. As a farmer, a citizen, and a

legislator, I believe it is wrong to expect or even to allow the government to give unlimited support to my farm or any farm, especially since our country has a record \$17 trillion national debt.

During the first full Senate farm debate in the summer of 2012—so the last Congress—my payment limit reforms were adopted by a vote of 75 to 24 here on the floor of this very body. During the first round of floor debate in the House in this Congress, Mr. FORTENBERRY from Nebraska offered the same reforms and they were adopted there in the House by a vote of 230 to 194. Congress has spoken, then, and overwhelmingly agrees in both bodies with my commonsense approach of limitations on the amount that one farming operation can get.

Wouldn't anyone think that policy, which is widely supported in both bodies of Congress and which saves taxpayers nearly \$400 million, would be untouchable when it comes to a conference committee? The rules of this institution, the Senate, outline that. Senate rule XXVIII, if anyone would like to look it up. However, once again, behind closed doors, Washington decided to intentionally screw up common sense.

This conference bill increases the payments available through the countercyclical program—now called price loss coverage or PLC for short—by 150 percent compared to what this Congress had already agreed upon. I have yet to hear anyone tell me a single legitimate reason why that change could be made.

Additionally, the powers that be in this town have proven they learned nothing from the World Trade Organization Brazil cotton case. That dispute has resulted in the United States paying a \$143 million fine per year to Brazilian cotton farmers because our farm program for cotton does not meet the rules of international trade. This farm bill doubles down on the same market distorting principles that brought us that very same trade dispute.

The original payment limit reforms that this Congress approved also eliminated abuses through what is commonly known as the "actively engaged loophole." To sum up this loophole, it makes it very easy for nonfarmers to get farm subsidies—probably those who go to the extent to hire a lawyer. This results in the largest 10 percent of the farms then, as I said before, getting 70 percent of the farm program's benefits, as I have already mentioned.

Yet the conference committee, in another brazen act of manipulation, eliminates my simple enforceable reform. I happen to think that one nonfarming manager per entity is more than generous and over the years it has been much violated. So we just simply say it ought to be one nonfarm manager per farm and no more. But it has been a lot worse, and my language—the language accepted by this body—reformed that. But as I have indicated a

couple times, the conference committee took it out.

The language in the bill now says—instead of the way it passed the Senate and passed the House on the floor of the House—USDA will have the opportunity to review and fix the actively engaged loophole but only if they should choose so; in other words, the Secretary of Agriculture does not have to.

I happen to know that Secretary Vilsack is sympathetic to what I have been trying to accomplish, so maybe he will be able to make something good out of what I think is a very bad provision in this bill that might actually make it very difficult for him to do that.

Under this provision, USDA could have fixed this problem—or even under existing law, I should say—USDA could have fixed this problem at any point, since it is the result of their rule-making. So giving, as the compromise does, the USDA power they already have and claiming reform happens to be a true—and true too often—example of a Washington hat trick.

The conferees did not stop at just kicking the decision over to the Department, they also tied the USDA's hands with unnecessary requirements that must be met before action can even be taken. That is why I say it is going to be difficult for Secretary Vilsack. I hope he can find ways to accomplish what I want to accomplish. As I said, I think that is where his heart is.

So I hope Secretary Vilsack, and I can even say the Obama administration, finally uses this authority to produce a strong, enforceable rule regarding the number of people who can be eligible for farm subsidies from taxpayers; in other words, people who are actually farming. I am certainly going to offer them my thoughts on this issue.

Maybe I should explain why I said even the Obama administration, beyond Secretary Vilsack. Because in this President's budget more than once and in the Bush budget more than once, Presidents—including this President—have suggested these reforms to save money. This year I said about \$400 million. Actually, according to CBO, it is \$387 million.

The Government Accountability Office released a report in October of 2013 that clearly outlines the problems with the actively engaged loophole. One farming partnership they highlighted was composed of 22 LLCs, with 20 different owners and 16 managers who got their eligibility through the actively engaged loophole.

So you understand why the bill that passed the Senate and the House said one manager. At least four of the managers I have referred to from that operation even live out of the State, while several others live in cities around the State well outside of commuting distance.

Additionally, just yesterday, it was reported that a large farming operation

in the State of Illinois is being fined \$5.3 million because they were exploiting taxpayers for farm subsidies. In this case, the government determined their business structure was intentionally designed to evade those payment limitations that are even in existing law with the exact fake entity structures my provisions would have nearly eliminated.

I wish to quote U.S. attorney Jim Lewis, who handled that case:

We are pleased with this favorable resolution of the government's claims of misuse of farm subsidy programs. These programs are designed to help farmers withstand market price volatility and the intrinsic risks associated with farming from year to year. Any attempt to exploit the system to take more than one's fair share is an improper use of government funds that erodes the public confidence in such programs and threatens their continued viability.

End of comment of U.S. Attorney Jim Lewis, who won that case against these farmers, and they will be fined that \$5.3 million.

I wish that U.S. attorney could have been part of the farm bill conference committee. His logic and expertise would have helped.

If a farm's business model depends on lawyers setting up complicated Mickey Mouse legal structures just to get more government subsidies, perhaps the owners of that entity are in the wrong business.

So my provisions would have limited subsidies going to a few thousand people who are very well off and, quite frankly, do not need unlimited farm payments from the government—and probably are not even involved with dirt under their fingernails—especially since, by definition, they would be people then who do not actually work on farms.

If we cannot cut subsidies that go to nonfarming millionaires, how will we ever find the courage then to fix other great entitlement problems we have in this country?

With all that said, there are a few things this bill does that are good.

The dairy provisions have ended up more market oriented than where we started, which I believe is very good. I am glad the Crop Insurance Program will remain strong for farmers across the country, and the nutrition program reforms are welcomed.

In the end, I have to make a judgment of the bill as a whole. Every Member of this Senate has to. I believe this bill, sadly, is a missed opportunity. The Congressional Budget Office says the final savings in this bill are only \$16.6 billion. That is a pretty small amount compared to the fact that it will spend nearly \$1 trillion.

I think my colleagues know I am a person who plays by the rules. So I played by the rules with these reforms that were adopted 2 years ago 75 to 24—not debated or voted on this year because they were part of the bill that passed the Senate and then went to the House of Representatives and were voted on there 230 to 194.

So we played by the rules. A majority of both bodies support these reforms. Yet, in the end, just a small group of people, with a single-minded intent to keep unlimited farm subsidies flowing out the door, proved that Congress deserves its 12-percent approval rating.

I want to be clear. I strongly support the business of agriculture. I have been involved in farming my whole life. My son Robin operates our family farm. I understand the industry. Growing wholesome foods to feed the world has always been one of the noblest occupations, in my opinion.

But if I were to vote yes on the bill, it would be an endorsement of the egregious manipulation of my payment limitation reforms behind closed doors. I cannot in good conscience do that. Therefore, I will oppose the Agricultural Act of 2014.

Just to kind of clarify, do you understand. I hope everybody understands we had the moral authority of a majority of the Senate, the moral authority of a majority of the House of Representatives, the moral authority of a majority of the people of this country—who I believe would say it is a good thing to save \$387 million—and yet that moral authority was avoided by conferees who thought: To heck with the majority of the Senate or a voting majority of the House of Representatives of 230 to 194. It does not mean anything. We can do whatever we want to do. We can waste that \$387 million. We can continue to give farm payments to people who are not farming. We can continue to let 10 percent of the biggest farmers get 70 percent of the benefits of the farm program, which, in the end, then helps subsidize big farmers getting bigger. There is nothing wrong with big farmers getting bigger, but you should not subsidize it. It drives up the price of farmland, it drives up the price of cash rent, so our young farmers cannot get started farming. If you want to preserve the family farm, that is one of the things that is very important.

So I have said my part. I hope I am around 5 years from now so I can try this once again because I do not intend to give up on this process. Five years from now is the next farm bill probably. Maybe there will be opportunities between now and then. I intend to take advantage of those opportunities.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be able to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MILITARY RETIREE CUTS

Mr. BOOZMAN. Madam President, I am here today as a voice for our veterans and career military servicemembers.

Since I came to Congress in 2001, I have served on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, both in the House and the

Senate, and have continuously fought to uphold the promises we have made with the men and women who served on behalf of our Nation. I am continually looking for opportunities to improve the lives of our veterans who have served honorably and have sacrificed, sometimes with their lives, in support of our country.

They deserve every benefit they earned and what we have promised them, but they have suffered a grave injustice in this body. Late last year the Senate, without my support, agreed to a budget that cut retirement benefits of our veterans, reducing the cost-of-living adjustment. I certainly could not support this provision.

Veterans and the American people are rightly upset. I want to share some of the letters I have received from our veterans and other Arkansans. David Mullins from Jonesboro wrote:

I am a 20 year veteran of the United States Army. I retired as a Sergeant First Class and I am currently drawing military retirement. I joined the Army when I was 18 years old and I wouldn't do anything different. Even though it was very hard at times, I know that was what I was supposed to be doing. Less than 1% of the American population serves in the military and of those only about 13% actually retire with 20 years or more of service. So we are talking about less than .02 percent of the population. It is really appalling that, after sacrificing my freedoms to protect those of my fellow citizens, this is how we are treated. America is out of touch.

I agree with David. In a letter I sent to the Armed Services Committee leadership in the House and Senate, I equated retirement compensation cuts to reaching into these individuals' retirement accounts and taking that money from them. This is unconscionable.

Diane from Hot Springs, AR, said in a letter:

I am truly disgusted by the new deal that cuts military pensions but doesn't touch benefits for any of the politicians. I would have no problems if it was an across the board cut. This is the best example of what is wrong with our government. Cut benefits for those that make real sacrifices for their country. They take lower pay and separation from family.

I agree with Diane. It is not fair. Our veterans should not be the ones bearing the burden for irresponsible spending. We need to cut spending and put our country on the path of fiscal responsibility, but it should not come at the expense of our Nation's military retirees. These are the only Americans who are being asked to sacrifice under the budget agreement. It is wrong to single out our servicemembers for what amounts to \$6 billion over 10 years, representing a .02-percent reduction. We need to right this wrong so our military retirees and their families have one less thing to worry about.

Terry Williamson from Jacksonville, AR, wrote:

I just retired from 26 years of active duty serving my country in the Air Force. I must say I was shocked and disappointed to learn that the pay of retirees are being offered up

to be reduced by 1% cost of living as part of the budget deal. I feel that I have lived up to and beyond my part in serving my country. I have not even received my first retirement check and yet already my government is short changing my and all veterans who have served and fulfilled their end of the deal, defending this great nation. I ask you to do what you can to not allow this to happen to a small portion of society that gave more to their country than most.

Terry, we are working to make sure you get the full retirement you earned. We are seeking ways to undo this cut and fully restore military pay.

In January Congress took the first step toward restoring veterans' COLAs with the passage of the Omnibus appropriations bill. This exempted medically retired disabled veterans and survivors from the COLA reductions. But there is more work to do. The good news is we are on your side.

Senator AYOTTE introduced the Keeping Our Promises to Our Military Heroes Act that repeals the COLA reduction for all military retirees. I am certainly proud to support that legislation.

Arkansans want Congress to fully restore military retiree benefits as soon as possible. I am committed to raising this priority at every possible opportunity until justice is realized for these military families. While there has been much discussion about restoring these benefits in future legislation, this should be done at the earliest opportunity in order to provide certainty for our military retirees' financial future.

To our Nation's military retirees, I am committed to this fight. You have earned these benefits. Congress must correct the wrong and restore your full retirement pay. As always, thank you for your service to our country.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HILL FARMSTEAD BREWERY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, Vermont is home to hundreds of world-class small businesses, each of which dots our economic landscape with their unique and often award-winning offerings. Our reputation for quality has made the "Vermont brand" one that is valued and sought after by consumers across the Nation—and increasingly also across the globe. One burgeoning

industry in Vermont is that of craft beer. In fact, the State is becoming almost as well known for its craft beers as it is for its maple syrup.

One such successful small brewery, the Hill Farmstead Brewery, was featured in the January 18, 2014, edition of the *New York Times*. After a planned expansion next year, the brewery's owner, Shaun Hill, plans to cap production at 150,000 gallons per year. His successful business model, and highly sought after brew, as the article states, "offers lessons in how limiting production can bring success."

Vermont's small-State appeal attracts business owners large and small. The Hill Farmstead Brewery is just one example of the successes Vermont's economy boast. I ask unanimous consent that a copy of "Craft Beer, the (Very) Limited Edition," from the January 18 *New York Times* be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the article was ordered to appear in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the *New York Times*, Jan. 18, 2014]

CRAFT BEER, THE (VERY) LIMITED EDITION

(By Claire Martin)

Two weeks ago, a beer drinker in Fresno, Calif., called Hill Farmstead Brewery in Vermont to ask where he could buy its craft beers. "You have to drive to the airport, get a ticket, fly to Burlington, rent a car and drive an hour and a half to the brewery," the owner, Shaun Hill, replied with a laugh. But he wasn't joking.

Hill Farmstead, in the hamlet of Greensboro, produces just 60,000 gallons of beer annually. The beer is available for purchase only at the brewery and in roughly 20 Vermont bars. In addition, Mr. Hill sends 12 kegs to distributors in New York City and Philadelphia a few times a year.

Next year, after several buildings are expanded and new equipment is installed, Mr. Hill plans to cap production at 150,000 gallons a year—forever. (For context, the Russian River Brewing Company, a craft brewery in California, made 437,100 gallons last year, and Dogfish Head Craft Brewery in Delaware produced 6.3 million gallons.)

Hill Farmstead is one of at least three Vermont craft breweries that are churning out small batches of highly sought-after beers and have owners with firm plans to keep the operations small. Mr. Hill's story offers lessons in how limiting production can bring success.

Mr. Hill, 34, has been honing his brewing technique for nearly 20 years. He first learned to make beer for a high school science-fair project, then started a homebrew club in college and later worked as the head brewer at two other Vermont breweries, the Shed and the Trout River Brewing Company, as well as one in Copenhagen, Norrebro Bryghus.

Two beers created during Mr. Hill's tenure at Norrebro Bryghus won gold medals in 2010 at the World Beer Cup, an international beer competition, and a third earned a silver medal.

Several months before these accolades, Mr. Hill returned to Vermont to begin construction on Hill Farmstead Brewery on a former dairy farm that he and his brother, Darren, a woodworker, inherited from their grandfather. "I wanted to make beer, I wanted to live in this place and I wanted to help my family and make sure I had the finances available to take care of this land in perpetuity," Mr. Hill says.